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Hecho Con Ganas: Latin@ Alternative and Activist Media

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Hecho Con Ganas: Latin@ Alternative and Activist Media

by

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Dedication

To the movers, shakers, noisemakers, rule breakers, the rebels and the queers who live their lives without apology.

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Abstract

Hecho Con Ganas: Latin@ Alternative and Activist Media

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The proliferation of independently produced Latin@ media has only intensified with the rise of new media technologies and saliency of online user-generated content in our present media culture. As online platforms become more open and new media technologies and devices make the creation and accessing of information easier, Latin@s and other minorities who have traditionally been marginalized within mainstream media culture and largely excluded from participating in media industries, are turning to the web to launch their own media projects. In more recent years, Latin@s have utilized new media to resist and challenge the mainstream. As a result, we have witnessed the appearance of Latin@-produced, non-commercial and/or activist oriented websites, videos, audio, and blogs that this thesis argues act as alternative and activist media.

Latin@ alternative and activist media may be understood as typically small-scale projects that posses little to no budget and that generally critique the marginalization and exclusion of Latin@s in mainstream media and U.S. society. In addition to contesting the

mainstream, Latin@ alternative and activist media express and question in-group identity and enact varying degrees of in-group civic participation and empowerment, resulting is the constitution of a multitude of Latinidades and the formation of Latin@ online communities and social media groups. Using *Latino Rebels* and Dreamers Adrift as case studies, I will examine the ways in which these particular examples of Latin@ alternative and activist media express divergent and/or radical perspectives of society through their processes and content while also connecting these media texts to the current social and political realities of Latin@s.

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Chapter 1: Me Oyes?[1]

This thesis is not about the "spin" surrounding Latin@s as a consumer market.[2] This thesis is not about market or corporate-driven "Latino media." This is a thesis inspired by the dedication and creativity of Latin@ media producers and activists involved in projects such as Dreamers Adrift and *Latino Rebels*. We Latin@s produce media as an extension of our constant struggle for equality and justice, as a means of depicting our cultures and communities on our own terms, and lastly, we make media for the sheer sake of creating. And we continue to do so in the face of exclusion and selective inclusion by media structures and other major institutions in the United States. It is with the history of Latin@ activism and resistance in mind that I study Latin@ alternative and activist media.

While Latin@ alternative and activist media comes in the form of various mediums and genres, this thesis will specifically examine examples of online Latin@ alternative and activist media. I believe that due to the relatively low barrier characteristics and inexpensiveness of the web (that is, in comparison to other mediums), that in more recent years Latin@ producers of alternative and activist media have utilized new media to resist and challenge the mainstream.[3] As a result, we have witnessed the appearance of Latin@-produced, non-commercial and/or activist oriented websites, videos, audio, and blogs, as well as the formation of Latin@ online communities and social media groups. Using *Latino Rebels* and Dreamers Adrift as case studies, I will examine the ways in which these particular examples of Latin@ alternative and activist media express divergent and/or radical perspectives of society through their processes

and content while also connecting these media texts to the current social and political realities of Latin@s.

These case studies demonstrate how some Latin@-produced media operate as alternative and activist media – that is, media that typically "express an alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities, and perspectives" (Downing v). Take for example the online videos of DREAMer and immigrant rights activists who make up the collective Dreamers Adrift that is dedicated to "documenting the undocumented" (Dreamers Adrift 2015).[4] Dreamers Adrift's large collection of videos is an extension of the collective members' activism and espouses a radical vision of citizenship and belonging. These videos resists the hegemonic order that is geared towards rendering undocumented immigrants invisible. The second example demonstrates the manner in which the creators of the Latin@ alternative journalism site envisions itself as developing independent content that prioritizes the perspectives and voices of Latin@s. *Latino Rebels* sees itself as standing in stark comparison to mainstream news outlets. Additionally, *Latino Rebels* and Dreamers Adrift were chosen as case studies because I believe they have established a certain presence within Latin@ intellectual and activist circles. Both case studies have managed to remain active over the course of four years, each building and curating an extensive repertoire of Latin@ alternative and activist content.

These collectives are but two examples of the wide breadth of Latin@ alternative and activist media that spans a range of genres, social movements, ideologies, and a number of different platforms. The proliferation of independently produced Latin@ media has only intensified with the rise of new media technologies and saliency of online

user-generated content in our present media culture. As online platforms become more open and new media technologies and devices make the creation and accessing of information easier, Latin@s and other minorities who have traditionally been marginalized within mainstream media culture and largely excluded from participating in media industries, are turning to the web to launch their own media projects. These new media projects are then examples of how marginalized individuals may exercise the right to speak and represent themselves in the digital age – or as Clemencia Rodriguez states, "to create one's own images of self and environment … to recodify one's own identity with signs and codes that one chooses" (3). These web-based projects take the form of blogs, YouTube channels, Twitter and Facebook accounts, and web pages that represent a wide range of cultural and political expressions. However, while these examples are primarily new media texts it is not my intention to suggest that Latin@ alternative and activist media only take place online, but instead argue that they are a part of a rich history of activist oriented Latin@ cultural production that in their own right possess alternative media characteristics. It is a history that includes Latin@ public performances and theater (Broyles-Gonzalez 2003), muralism and poster making (Gaspar de Alba 2004; Barnet-Sanchez 2001; Vargas 2010), feminist and queer print cultures (Blackwell 2012), radical presses (Chabrán and Chabrán1984; Lao-Montes 2001), radio (Casillas 2006; Casteñeda Paredes 2003), film and video (Camplis 1979; Jiménez 1996; Ramirez-Berg 2002; Noriega 2002, López 1996), and public television programming (Noriega 2002, Jiménez 1996). Many of these Latin@ cultural productions were used to help mobilize communities for political action in addition to existing as modes of self-

representation. They also embodied what Chicana/o studies scholars call *rasquachismo* in reference to the underdog sensibility and minimalist aesthetic that these forms often possessed (Kanellos 1979; Ybarra-Frausto 1989; Mesa-Bains 1999; and Noriega 2000). On one hand, rasquachismo has been used to describe Chicana/o creative expression in terms of its material aspects (in which the most is made from the least), and on the other, rasquachismo also represents a political stance or an identity of the underdog, the other. In this sense, I believe we may think of rasquachismo as also representing an oppositional stance of sorts that expresses alternative visions or perspectives of the world to that of the dominant society. Furthermore, the use of the Spanish, Portuguese, Indigenous languages, and the code switching of English and colloquial Spanish dialects such as Tex-Mex, caló, or Nuyorican Spanish, for instance, in Latin@ cultural production are ways that Latin@s resist the dominance of monolingualism in the United States, as well as ways to speak specifically and intimately to their communities. These characteristics are some of the ways that Latin@-produced media have always been alternative.

On Terminology

Before I continue on with my review of alternative media and Latino media scholarship, I would like to first to discuss my choice of terminology. I feel very strongly that any research that deals with communities and cultures as diverse as Latin@s should a) acknowledge the issues in using an overlaying umbrella term to discuss a pan-ethnic/national group of people and b) be aware of the ways that terminology and/or language can perpetuate inequalities. For instance, the common use of "Latin**o**" is masculine; its use to describe people of Latin American descent regardless of their gender

identity may be discursively understood as upholding the dominance of maleness and patriarchy. Power operates impalpably through language; I believe that as creators of knowledge, scholars should put in the work and be critical of the terminology they use and the politics of representation surrounding such terminology.

There has been much debate as to what to call people whose ancestry is tied to countries of Latin America (Oboler 1995). Should we use a pan-ethnic term for the sake of solidarity and/or demonstrating a large, unified market? Or should we privilege ethnic and nationality labels in order to preserve cultural diversity? There is no right or wrong answer; and the fact that there is no definite answer points to the manner in which labels or terminology can affect the meaning of citizenship and their roles in struggles for equality (Oboler 1995). While pan-ethnic terms fail to properly acknowledge specific cultural and political histories/herstories and differences, they can be an effective way for rallying together a large group of people who share similar (yet different) experiences of migration, colonization, and discrimination, and also for trying to gain visibility and access to resources and institutions such as academia.

Currently in academia the preferred terminology seems to teeter between Latino and Latina/o. Latino is used sometimes to talk specifically about male individuals of Latin American ancestry but more often than not it is used to discuss Latin American people regardless of gender. Scholars who are especially attentive to issues of gender tend to use Latina/o or Latino/a as a means to disrupt the privileging of masculine language. However, as some queer Latin@ scholars point out, Latina/o still encompasses a masculinity vs. femininity binary that is predominantly heterosexual. More recently,

there have been moves amongst more politically radical Latin@ activists and scholars to "queer" the term Latino/a by using instead Latin@ or Latinx (pronounced Lah-teen-es), with the latter term being less common in academic circles. My own use of Latin@ is part of this radical shift in terminology. While the term Latin@ has sometimes been read by people as a short hand for Latina/o, the term has also been used as an alternative to not only establish gender neutrality but to also include individuals who are gender fluid or who do not subscribe to the gender binary. I use Latin@ throughout this thesis as a means of promoting a term that disrupts the dominance of heterosexuality, masculinity, and binarism, as well as to recognize individuals who are typically erased from discussions of Latin@s or Latinidad because they do not speak Spanish, such as Brazilians and Indigenous peoples. Therefore, in regards to this study the term Latin@ is used to represent the breadth of Latina/o/x identities and subjectivies that varying in terms of gender identification, racial identification, sexuality, generation, nationality, linguistics, citizen-status, and even regional-specificity.

Additionally, I also believe that one should have a clear understanding of what is meant by Latin@-produced media in this work. Building upon Félix F. Gutiérrez's definition of Latino media, which he states are "print, broadcast, film and digital media produced by, for, or about people in the Latino communities they are covering or portraying" (Gutiérrez 104), I suggest the addition of the word "produced" and the queering of the word Latino in order to emphasize the active participation and agency of Latin@s in the creation of media content and/or art, as well as to point to the differentiating functions and audiences of these media. Therefore, this thesis offers up a

definition of Latin@-produced media as content made by Latin@ that covers and/or depicts the lived unique experiences of Latin@s and their respective communities. It emphasizes the presence of Latin@s in creative decision making roles and makes central questions regarding production processes, organization, orientation, and individual/collective goals. Latin@-produced media can be transnational and/or local, pan-Latin@ and/or ethnic specific, political and/or activist in nature, and assimilationist and/or culturally resistant within mainstream and alternative media spaces. Latin@ media producers utilize the same old and new media technologies as their primarily white mainstream counterparts in their coverage of news events or cinematic storytelling, for instance. However, the production strategies, aesthetics, and discursive intent of Latin@-produced media can oscillate between working in strict opposition and/or having a negotiated stance with mainstream media. Latin@-produced media "look through an insider's (Latino) eyes at Latinos and their lives" as they find a balance between serving Latin@ and their communities and marketing them as an audience (Gutiérrez 104; Rodríguez 1999; Rodriguez and Beltrán 2015). That is to say that Latin@-produced media represent the perspectives and insights in regards to Latin@s and their lived experiences that are generally far more complex in their coverage and representation than that of mainstream media (which has historically been hetero-white-male dominated and focused), and as in the case of market-driven Latin@ media, also participating in media industry practices and market trends.

Latin@s and the U.S. Mainstream

Media Industry Employment

According to population estimates in 2013 Latin@s account for seventeen percent of the United States' total population. Estimated at around 54 million people, Latina/os are the largest U.S.'s largest ethnic or racial minority and are projected to double in size within the next fifty years, which would mean 1 in 3 U.S. residents would be Latina/o (United States Census Bureau 2014). However, the diverse experiences, social contributions, complexities and cultural expressions of this pan-ethnic group have for the most part been erased or marginalized in mainstream institutions and networks. Despite these figures, media activists and scholars have documented over time that Latin@s continue to be largely underrepresented in mainstream media and/or reduced to stereotypes despite becoming a highly sought after consumer market in recent years (Limón 1973; Cortes 1992; Ramírez-Berg 2000; Valdivia 2010; Dávila 2014) while at the same time they continue to struggle for creative decision making positions in media industries.

For instance, in the recent study "the Latino Media Gap: a Report on the State of Latinos in U.S. Media," Frances Negrón-Muntaner et al. state that in the last three years, Latin@s made up 1.1 percent of producers, 2 percent of writers, and 4.1 percent of directors in the television industry. Furthermore, they accounted for none of the top ten television show creators. In regards to film, Latin@s constituted 2.3 percent of directors, 2.2 percent of producers and 6 percent of writers. Negrón-Muntaner et al also report that Latin@s currently make up none of the studio heads, network presidents, CEOs, or owners of major production companies (2014: 3). In regards to news media, in 2012 the American Society of New Editors reported that Latin@s comprised 4.07 percent of

journalists on daily newspapers, while the Radio Television Digital News Association reported that Latin@s account for 7.3 percent of local television and 2.6 percent of radio news employees (Guitérrez 2014). While some would argue that limited progress has been made in recent years in employment, significant gaps in mainstream the lack of employment for Latin@s in media industries persist.

Media Representation

Considering the rather dismal numbers of Latin@s in creative decision making positions, it is not completely surprising that Latin@ representation in mainstream media continually fails to acknowledge the cultural diversity amongst Latin@s. Furthermore, predominant portions of mainstream media espouse racist and nativist discourse of white supremacy: that Latin@s are foreign, they are uneducated, that they are criminals, and on the extreme end of said discourse, that Latin@s are social contagion that threaten "American values" and the "American way of life" (Chavez 2002; Amaya 2014). As census data documents the persistent growth of Latin@s overtime, fears and anxieties of the "brown invasion" have manifested throughout the last three decades in mainstream media culture in the form of stereotypes. However, even before the Soledad O'Brien led *Latino in America* news series had the chance to explore the doomsday 2050 Latino take-over of the United States, activists and film and media studies scholars documented the presence of stereotypes in film, television, and new media representations of Latin@s. For instance, a key text in regards to Latin@ representation in film is Charles Ramírez-Berg's *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion, Resistance* (2000). Ramírez-Berg identifies six recurring stereotypes of Latinos throughout the history of U.S. cinema.[5]

These six stereotypes include that of the bandido, the harlot, the male buffon, the female clown, the Latin lover, and the dark lady. Furthermore, Ramirez-Berg identifies how sexuality is often at the center of each of these stereotypes and is used as a narrative device to amuse or test the morals of the typical white male hero or the purity of white femininity (1990, 2002). Carlos E. Corteś argues that film functions as an educational tool to create and shape perceptions of the world whether or not it intends to, and therefore stereotypes in film have the power to mold perceptions of what groups of people, and specifically here his focus is on Mexican Americans and Chicanos, are essentially like (1992). He identifies strategies in which meaning is visually, discursively, and linguistically shaped through stereotypes. Stereotypes work to simplify and exaggerate physical and behavioral characteristics in order to construct hegemonic notions of cultural difference(s) and uphold a society's status quo (Shohat and Stam 1994; Hall 1997).

In regards to prime-time English language television, representations of U.S. Latin@s have ranged from non-existent to sparse. In their study concerning Hispanic characters in TV entertainment over the span of 40 years (1950-1994), Lichter and Amundson often refer to rare instances of Latin leads in television series as "notable exceptions," and overall identified that only 2 percent of prime-time characters were of Latin or Hispanic origin (1997). Furthermore, studies by Mastro and Behm-Morawitz (2005), Hoffman and Noriega (2004), Valdivia (2010) noted Latin@s television representation had only grown from 2 to 6 percent since 2001. It is unclear what the exact percent of Latin@ characters currently occupy prime-time, but a glance at the prime-time

schedule will demonstrate that Latin@ lead characters in English-language television are still largely absent (with except of show's like *Jane the Virgin* (2014-) and *Cristal* (2014-)) and what minor Latin@ characters due exist are far and few between.

The fact that so little of mainstream media includes Latin@ narratives increases the symbolic value and work of what representation does exist. Latin@s, therefore, face what George Gerbner terms symbolic annihilation (1972) by U.S. mainstream media in the sense that their lived experiences and voices are significantly exclude from the public sphere, as well as that existing representations produced largely by and for the white people racialize and marginalize Latin@s. For these reasons, the creation of alternative and activist Latin@-produced media can be understood as a strategy for Latin@s to make themselves seen and heard. Latin@ alternative and activist media demonstrate the various ways Latin@s resist and/or talk back to the mainstream's constructions of them. They confront the stereotypes that Ramírez-Berg's work identifies and address issues immediately impacting their families and extended communities that mainstream media outlets either distort or ignore completely.

Alternative and Activist Media

In this section, I seek to develop the theoretical foundation for investigating the alternative and activist characteristics of *Latino Rebels*' and Dreamers Adrift's production and organizational processes and content in the following chapters. My goal is to demonstrate how conceptualizing Latin@-produced media (and specifically that which is made independent or non-commercially) as alternative media affords us the opportunity to put into perspective the various dimensions of alternity, or alternativeness,

in media produced by an extremely diverse marginalized ethno-racial group. That is to say, alternative media as a critical lens elucidates the differentiating practices, audiences, and ideological stances existing between U.S. mainstream media and independent Latin@-produced media. Additionally, the current relationship between U.S. mainstream media and Latin@ alternative and activist media is the result of the rather long and ongoing cultural and political struggles between Latin@s and the ethno-racially white majoritarian that happens to dominate key institutions of our civil society. Drawing from the scholarship of John D.H. Downing and Clemencia Rodriguez, this introduction develops an understanding of what I argue is Latin@ alternative and activist media.

There has been much debate concerning what constitute alternative media. On one hand, there is no one canonical definition of alternative media but instead there exists a breadth of definitions that stress different dimensions and characteristics of these media, and on the other, some scholars have even questioned whether or not the term alternative media is sufficient; posing alternative terms such as radical media, citizens media, and critical media (Downing 2001; Rodriguez 2001; Fuchs 2010). While the discord regarding alternative media may call into question the usefulness/existence of this genre of media, I would argue that this ongoing debate highlights our desire and even need to understand public expression that deviates from the status quo and seeks to alter it. As Leah Lievrouw states in her book, *Alternative and Activist New Media*, the domination of media industries by a handful of corporations and institutions contributed to the creation of a "mainstream media culture" in which people are "viewed mainly as collective 'publics,' markets, or audiences" (1). Alternative and activist, in contrast, media produce

and circulate content expressing differing or radical perspectives of society and critiques of mainstream culture. These expressions are mediated in a variety of ways and are often major components of social movements.

Downing has discussed these seemingly rebellious modes of communication as alternative media and more specifically as radical alternative media. In the first edition of *Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements* (1984), Downing provides a simple definition of radical alternative media as "media, generally small scale and in many different forms, that express an alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities, and perspectives" (v). Alternative media, according to Downing, vary in regards to format, meaning these media can range from the theater to new media. Moreover, it is often due to their non-normative or "alternative" content that these media are "typically small-scale, generally underfunded, sometimes largely unnoticed at least initially, on occasion the target of great anger or fear or ridicule from on high, or even the general public, or both" (xi). Issues such as funding and systematic censorship that manifest out of anger and/or fear by the state or general public are some of the reasons why radical alternative media are sometimes short-lived, operate small ranges of circulation, and possess niche audiences that would other-wise seem insignificant when in comparison to the mainstream.

Furthermore, in the second edition of his book (2001), Downing attempts to push the discussion of alternative media beyond a strict binary of mainstream vs. alternative that came to fruition in the first version of his book. Moving away from this binarism, Downing encourages nuanced understandings of radical alternative media that takes in

account the manner in which oppositional movements and groups may consume and/or create mainstream media, as well as take into account how mainstream thought/expression can reflect alternity – consider the extreme rightist media that continues to proliferate on channels such as FOX news. It is mainstream because it is funded and aired on a major cable network but the ideologies in which they espouse typically deviate from the current liberal expectation of multiculturalism and regime of political correctness that society's majoritarian have decided as the status quo.

Downing also seeks to expand upon his definition of alternative media and sketches out ten characteristics of radical alternative media. These characteristics include: that these media represent a wide range of perspectives, may include ethnic or minority media, vary in terms of radicalism, effectiveness, and realities of oppression, they may exist underground due to systematic repression and censorship, utilize a number of formats, these works all "break somebody's rules," are small-scale and often underfunded, express opposition from subordinate positions and may be used to build solidarity among members, and attempt to be more democratic (ix-xi). Downing's qualifications concerning minority and/or ethnic media as well as the extent to which certain media are strict in their radicalism are particularly important in relation to developing an understanding of Latin@ alternative and activist media. Specifically, in regards to ethnic or minority media Downing states, "Radical media may also include minority ethnic media… depending on the issues at stake in the communities in questions. Everything depends on their content and context … so context and consequences must be our primary guides to what are or are not definable as radical

alternative media" (x). In this sense, Downing argues that ethnic and/or minority media is not inherently alternative or radical. It is the socio-political stakes facing these marginalized groups and the counter-discursive and/or non-normative characteristics of these texts that qualifies them as alternative media. Furthermore, his point that alternative media may vary in their radicalism also demonstrates the ways in which alternative media may possess hegemonic characteristics or may utilize practices of the mainstream in the production of their expressions.

However, regardless of this move away from binarism, his fashioning of the term *radical alternative media* implies a strong association with media that possess rebellious and politicized characteristics. For instances, in his attempt to expand upon his definition, Downing proposes that alternative media intend to a) "express opposition vertically from subordinate quarters directly at the power structure and against its behavior" and b) "build support, solidarity, and networking laterally against policies or even against the very survival of the power structure" (xi). So even as Downing attempts to move us past a binary his fashioning of *radical alternative media*, discursively frames an understanding of alternative media as the powerless, or the less powerful in some instances, acting against the powerful. It anchors alternative media to the notions of resistance, movement, and activism and leaves little room for media that may still be alternative in it's content and processes, but whose political ideologies are not radical.

Although, Downing's work is often thought of as a pillar of alternative media studies, some scholars have charged his definition of radical alternative media as too tied to social movements and unable to fully account for texts/projects that are less activist or

movement oriented and more artistic based. For instance, Chris Atton, in his book, *Alternative Media* (2002), interrogates how and why individuals and collectives produce and use alternative media to make meaning while stressing the importance of the cultural, historical, and political contexts in the study of alternative media. In this work, Atton attempts to develop his own definition of alternative media that is not limited to the political and "resistance" media of Downing's and Tim O'Sullivan's (1994) definitions. Atton believes that Downing and O'Sullivan's definitions of alternative media focus primarily on political projects that "avowedly reject or challenge established and institutional politics, in the sense that they all advocate change in society, or at least a critical reassessment of traditional values" (1994: 10). He thus seeks to broaden the conceptualization of alternative media to account for newer cultural forms and what he calls "hybrid electronic communication" (7). Atton's approach is useful for thinking about how formats such as zines and digital comics produced by Latin@ artists and writers are also forms of alternative media despite not being blatantly attached to a social movement or how their organizational and production processes may reflect alternity even if the content do not. I will utilize Atton's promotion of studying the organizational and production strategies and goals of alternative media and its practioners in my examination *Latino Rebels* as alternative journalism.

Another scholar whose interest lies in complicating definitions of alternative media is Clemencia Rodriguez. She advocates for an alternative media approach that acknowledges the complexities of power (2001). Drawing on the work of feminist scholars Chantal Mouffe and Kristie McClure in her book, *From Alternative Media to*

Citizens Media, Rodriguez attempts to decenter discussions of power from traditional and essentialist perspectives and suggests that rather than solely thinking of power as a binary struggle between those in power (mass corporations and the state) and the powerless (indigenous groups, ethnic minorities, and other marginalized peoples), we gain much more critically in understanding power as a "myriad of power equations that involve anyone and everyone in the community" (16). This binary between the powerful and the powerless, Rodriguez argues, typically frames analysis in terms of success, and as a result alternative media are typically regarded as failures because they ultimately fail to overcome their fragmentation.

This is especially the case in Hector Amaya's *Citizen Excess: Latino/as, Media, and the Nation* (2013). While his primary focus is not Latin@ alternative and activist media, his discussion of the Latin@ immigrant right marches of 2006 and the alternative media activism that followed is rather pessimistic and alludes to this notion of failure. In his brief section regarding alternative media, he argues that these Latin@ activists and their efforts are "marginal." Amaya states:

> They have little to no chance to impact our nation's mainstream culture. This is an example of how the agonistics of hegemonic processes in the national realm engender tragedy. These activists are on the fringes of our video culture, barely existing. They are marginal to the nation's pursuits, their goals irrelevant, their voices dim (120).

While not completely unjustified, this way of thinking is unproductive and ultimately reinforces the binary between the momentous power of the state and the powerless minority group. Who can ever win with those kinds of odds? The short answer is no one can win.

Amaya and scholars such as Christian Fuchs and Marisol Sandoval (2013), who share this perspective, I argue, ultimately fail to see how power is much more complicated and dynamic. We all wield power and privilege in different situations and at different times. Take into account the power dynamics in regards to gender among a racial or ethnic minority group within its respective community. Despite the fact that they are marginalized by the nation-state due to their race or ethnicity, minority men still possess privilege within their communities as a result of patriarchy. This complex web of power relations is where Clemencia Rodriguez's conceptualization of alternative media as citizen media is extremely helpful. Rodriguez's effort to decenter the powerful/powerless binary affords us the opportunity to capture the nuances of empowerment and participation in the creation of alternative media. It also moves the discussion from immediate impact and success to a much more dynamic and layered understanding of impact and affect.

Rodriguez's theorization of alternative media as *citizen media* is primarily accomplished through her use of Mouffe and McClure's theory of radical democracy, which she argues "delves into new understandings of how power is produced, who produces power, and how processes of constitution and reconstitution of power affect democratic processes" (17). Her aim is to craft a framework for studying alternative media that is not essentialist but is able to describe the way that participating in the creation of alternative media can "spin transformative processes that alter people's senses of self, their subjective positionings, and therefore their access to power" (18). In other

words, we should attempt to capture the nuances of empowerment and participation in the crafting of a definition of alternative media.

However, while Rodriguez's approach seeks to represent creators of alternative media projects as active and empowered participants, regardless of social status, I take issue with her preferred term of citizens' media. I argue that the term fails to recognize the very real affordances of state constructed citizenship. It also ignores the inherent assumptions of words like citizen and citizenship and the debilitating effects on those who lack citizenship and legal status. This is problematic, especially in regards to the manner in which Latin@s have been denied both symbolic and legal forms of citizenship –they are excluded from the U.S.'s social imaginary as legitimate members of the nation and are stigmatized, or rather racialized as foreigners (Chavez 2002; Amaya 2013). For some, they also lack legal citizenship, rights and protections guaranteed by the state. For example, Amaya contends that because Latinos lack both cultural and legal citizenship, Latino media (which he sees as primarily Spanish-language media) cannot simply be seen as civic participation. That is, because the dominant civil society does not count Latin@s as legitimate members, as citizens within their social imaginaries, and because Latino creative expression is not acknowledged by the civil society as impacting or contributing to the U.S. democratic process in a significant or authentic way, Latino media cannot be simply discussed in terms of citizenship.[6]

While I think Amaya is right to disrupt utopian notions of citizenship and participation (which Rodriguez's citizen media espouses) and to point out the ways Latin@s continue to be racialized and excluded by the nation-state, his argument is

inflexible. It leaves no room for the grey areas where Latin@s' feelings and understandings of belonging to the nation and their expression of civic participation – expressions that can either challenge or support the nation-state's hegemonic order – exist. While Amaya's concern is primarily behavioral and mine focuses on affect, I argue that to disregard Latin@s' sense of belonging is to further the work of ethno-racial white supremacy. Yes, Amaya is correct in that Latin@s are continuously cast as foreigners and villains in the mainstream public sphere, but that does not mean that Latin@s do not see themselves as citizens. Furthermore, it definitely should not give scholars reason to treat Latin@ media activism and expression as *meaningless*.

I propose utilizing Downing and Rodriguez's conceptualizations of alternative media but rejecting their choice of terms. Instead, I prefer to use "alternative and activist media" in discussing Latin@-produced media that possess alternative characteristics in their organizational and production processes and/or content. Drawing from Downing, I define Latin@ alternative and activist media as typically small-scale projects that posses little to no budget and that generally critique the marginalization and exclusion of Latin@s in mainstream media and U.S. society. While many of these projects may emerge from social movements or activism, not all Latin@ alternative media have affiliations with social movements or groups. Moreover, Rodriguez presents us with a way to theorize how communities enact legal, political, and cultural citizenship through *actively* participating in and transforming the dominant mediascape, as well as contesting social codes, hegemonically constructed and institutionally imposed identities and social relations. In constructing a definition of Latin@ alternative and activist media, my goal is

to address various power relations that shape the wide range of Latin@s' experiences and expressions. Latin@ alternative and activist media should not be strictly understood as the process of a minority group contesting racism and demanding access and rights from the mainstream through self representation. Instead, I argue that in addition to contesting the mainstream, Latin@ alternative and activist media express and question in-group identity and enact varying degrees of in-group civic participation and empowerment, resulting is the constitution of a multitude of Latinidades.

Furthermore, as exemplified by the case study examining the media activism of Dreamers Adrift, Latin@ alternative and activist media is also about strengthening social movements and identity-based networks and visually and symbolically working through what I believe to be *hegemonic trauma*. I offer up this term as a means of discussing the psychological trauma inflicted on people by society and/or aspects of socialization – that is, the process by which we inherit and disseminate norms, customs, and ideologies. More specifically, *hegemonic trauma* may refer to the trauma inflicted on individuals belonging to marginalized groups, imposed on them from their experiences with prejudice or discrimination and their exposure to processes that render their communities invisible. For Latin@s, this includes the racialization and exploitation of our bodies and communities perpetrated by capitalism, the state, and mainstream media. Arlene Dávila has noted the existing tension between the exclusion and selective inclusion of Latin@s in U.S. society in her book, *Latino, Inc.* (2001). She states:

> Latinos are continually recast as authentic and marketable, but ultimately as a foreign rather than intrinsic component of U.S. society, culture, and history,

> suggesting that the growing visibility of Latino populations parallels an expansion of the technologies that render them exotic and invisible (4).

Hegemonic trauma acknowledges the ways Latin@s deal to varying degrees with the stigmatization of our bodies, accents, cultures, and communities; that some of us struggle with self-hate, anger, and depression due in part to our exclusion from U.S. society. Dreamers Adrift and other Latin@ alternative and activist media determinedly seek to create spaces for discussing these traumas.

Latin@ Alternative and Activist Media Pasts and Futures

Print Media

While the case studies examined in this thesis are new media texts, Latin@ alternative and activist media should not be thought of as a recent phenomenon or art form. As Ed Morales has argued, Latin@s and our media have always been alternative though we have generally been left out of scholarly discussions concerning alternative media (2014). To some extent, I am inclined to agree with Morales. Latin@s of various ethnicities/nationalities at different time periods have been engaged in struggles for equality, justice, and/or liberation and the creation of media has very much been a part of these struggles. Much of these Latin@-produced media postulate critiques of U.S. mainstream culture and the ways it depicts Latin@s and Latin America (often in a criminalizing fashion), while some also engage in political debate concerning their home countries.

For example, the existence of what Downing (1989, 2002) has termed alternative and radical presses have been well documented in studies focusing on Latin@ print

media (Chabrán and Chabrán 1993; Lao-Montes 2014). These radical presses include the journalistic and activist efforts of Mexicans, Chicana/os, Puerto Ricans, Cuban Americans, Salvadorians, and Dominicans. Chabrán and Chabrán have identified four categories of Latino press: exile press, immigrant press, and community "bulletin boards", and periodicals. Exile and immigrant presses are print media that are concerned with notions of "homeland," but the point in which they differ is that immigrant press media eventually come to see themselves as permanent communities in the United States. An excellent example of the evolution of an immigrant press is *La Opinión* (1926-). Chabrán and Chabrán explain community bulletin media as being local-oriented and much more directed at specific issues. Also a part of this alternative journalism and radical press history are Latin@ periodicals such as magazines and zines specifically interested in celebrating a ethno-nationalist culture, fashion, and art, as well as literary/scholarly journals such as *Aztlán* (1970-) and *El Grito* (1967).

These Latin@-produced alternative and radical presses have their origins in Latin American presses as well as date back to the anti-Díaz movement in the years before the Mexican Revolution and social and labor movements within Puerto Rican and Cuban communities in the U.S. as well as their respective countries (Chabrán and Chabrán 368). A number of alternative and radical Latina/o print media emerged during the Chicano and Puerto Rican civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s that acted as a means to organize and inform communities, as well as provided space for Chicana/o and Nuyorican art, storytelling, and poetry. Within this time period, Chicana feminist and queer print cultures also emerged. In her book, *Chicana Power!* (2011), Maylei

Blackwell discusses the development of gendered imagined communities in her critical study of Chicana publications such as *Hijas de Cuauhtemoc* and *Encuentro Femenil*. Blackwell argues that these publications served as a means for Chicanas to discuss community events and issues, as well as debate and discuss ideological differences within the Chicana/o movement. The alternative journalism website *Latino Rebels* is part of this legacy of radical presses and print cultures.

In her book *Making Latino News: Race, Language, Class* (1996), América Rodriguez examines the cultural production of Latinos in regards to news making.[7] Although her work does not focus on alternative journalism, she demonstrates some of the dominant ways that Latino news has operated in general. She determines that Latino news functions in two distinct ways: first that it works to keep readers connected to one's homeland, and second, it is a useful tool in helping recently arrived immigrants a way to adapt to life in the U.S (5). Also, Rodriguez makes it clear that the reason that Latino newsmaking exists is because of the exclusionary practices of the dominant society. However, she is also quick to point out that the first creators of a distinct Latino news press belonged to a 1.5 generation experience (Latin@s who are foreign born, but have lived in the U.S. for a significant amount a time) and tended to be educated – forming what she terms a "Latino elite" (2). These Latino newsmakers were in agreement with the traditions and ideologies of journalism but were also advocates for the inclusion of Latinos in all aspects of U.S. society (8). While a number of these Latin@ journalists spoke of the exclusion of Latinos from the mainstream and the importance of a separate Spanish-language press, Rodriguez demonstrates that these presses often times embodied

an assimilationists language. Her scholarship reveals the need to be cautious of assuming that all ethnic or minority media is alternative. It reveals a need to look at the social, political, and cultural layers of Latin@-produced media, especially as it relates to Latin@ media that is alternative in stance or activist-oriented.

Film and Television

Another area of study concerning alternative and activist Latin@ media production explores the work of early Latin@ independent film and television producers that emerge in the Civil Rights era. One of the earliest studies of Chicano cinema is Gary D. Keller's *The Image of the Chicano in Mexican, United States and Chicano Cinema: An Overview* (1985). This piece of scholarship chronicles Chicano representation, as it existed in Mexican and U.S. film while also providing an in-depth look at the various forms of Chicano filmmaking in which he identifies documentary as one of the most utilized cinematic genres by Chicano filmmakers. These documentaries covered a wide range of issues and topics such as: educational reform, art and culture, the lives of migrant labor workers, youth and gang violence, and women. The Chican@ filmmakers of these documentaries often aligned themselves with social movement organizations such as the United Farmworkers and Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) and/or saw their films as engaging in the work of social justice. I believe that these early Latin@ cinemas possessed alternative and activist characteristics in the sense that they were typically low budget productions that postulated critiques of U.S. politics and mainstream culture in their depictions of Latin@s' social realities and their cultures.

Furthermore, this notion of subversion and resistance is prominent in the way scholarship has framed Chican@ and other Latin@ cinema. For instance, in *Chicanos and Film: Representation and Resistance* (1992), Noriega states that Chicano cinema developed in opposition to Hollywood and sought to create socially conscious content (xv). *Chicanos and Film* also includes the manifestos of Chicano and Latino filmmakers and shares some of the ways that these filmmakers theorized film. For example, in a manifesto entitled, "Towards the Development of a Raza Cinema," Francisco X. Camplis (1975) argues that film is the medium with the highest potential to cause social change" (1992: 293). Camplis manifesto is an example of how a majority of scholarship has often framed Latino-produced film in relation to activism. Furthermore, Camplis' manifesto calls upon other "Raza" filmmakers and artists to align themselves with more radical methods in order to create Raza films that reflect the many realities of Raza people (293). The use of the term Raza point to one of the ways that some Chican@ artists attempted to align themselves with other Latin American peoples as a means of solidarity but also as a means of further developing Latin@ artistic and visual culture.[8] However, also in this call to rally a Raza cinema, Camplis calls for a separation and resistance to "white yankee imperialist filmmaking" (293). The language Camplis uses in terms of radicalism and Raza cinema's separation from the mainstream is very much in line with the way other radical alternative and activist media have organized themselves. Moreover, Lillian Jiménez's study of Puerto Rican/Nuyorican cinema is also framed within the context of activism and subversion (1996). Jiménez documents the manner in which Puerto Rican/Nuyorican documentaries addressed issues within Puerto Ricans' communities and

their ties to activist organizations such as the Young Lords (30). Meanwhile Ana M. López argues that Cuban American and Cuban exile films spoke directly to the struggles in Cuba while also reconciling Cubans' feelings in regards to their new lives in the United States (1996). Additionally, there has also been research into the specific film and video practices of Chicana and Latina filmmakers. As documented by Fregoso (1992), early Chicana-helmed films tended to be short in length and experimental in their mixing of media conventions, to satisfy personal artistic goals while also facing financial limitations. She argues that despite gender and financial barriers, Chicanas continue to find ways to economically produce their projects and remain true to their values. The mixing of genre and medium convention by Chicana filmmakers can therefore be thought of as alternative in the sense that their experimental films part with the expectations and aesthetics of mainstream filmmaking.

In regards to Latin@-produced television, Chon Noriega (2002) and Lillian Jiménez (1996) discuss the emergence of Chicana/o and Puerto Rican public access television, respectively. In Noriega's *Shot in America: Television, the State and the Rise of Chicano Cinema* (2000), he explains how media-focused activism lead to a number of industry trainee programs, film school admissions policies, and local public affairs shows. These public affairs TV series were geared towards instilling a sense of cultural pride and reclamation through the exhibiting of Chicano art and performance. These series also showcased a number of the early long and short length documentaries made by Chicana/o and Latina/o filmmakers. Noriega states, "[Chicano] media-oriented groups challenged the industry from a number of perspectives: direct action, litigation, and

petitions before the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) and other regulatory agencies" (16). Noriega's study of Chican@ and Latin@ media activism demonstrates how media functioned in tandem with Chican@ and Latin@ civil rights movements, and also delivers a history of Latin@ public access television that I would argue is alternative.

Digital Media

More recently, scholarship on Latino media has turned to the web for objects of study. Taking into consideration the increasing adoption of new media technologies amongst Latin@s, I believe that the study of digital Latin@-produced media will continue to grow as an important site for study. For instances, recent research into the technology and media habits of Latin@s reveals that 72 percent of Latin@s own a desktop or laptop computer, 86 percent of Latin@s own cellphones, 48 percent own smartphones, and that 78 percent of Latin@ adults go online (Lopez, Gonzalez-Barrea, and Patten 2013). In the report, "Hispanics in U.S. Highly Active on Mobile and Social," Nielsen reported that Latin@s engage at various levels with online video, social networking, and additional types of English and Spanish entertainment via smartphones and other mobile devices and that Latin@s are 62 percent more likely than other U.S. groups to stream online videos and 17 percent more likely to build and update personal blogs (2012). Therefore, studying the alternative and activist digital media production of groups such as *Latino Rebels* and Dreamers Adrift is important not only in nuancing our understandings of Latin@s' experiences and their strategies for navigating and surviving in a society with institutions that are often racist and oppressive.

One contribution to the study of Latina/o produced alternative digital media has been Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez's book, *Brown Eyes on the Web: Unique Perspectives of an Alternative U.S. Latino Online Newspaper* (2003). Rivas-Rodriguez explains how the Internet has generally been discussed and "leveling the playing field" for small scale alternative news projects, and is critical as to what extent the Internet has served as equal opportunity space for these alternative producers in addressing issues regarding the digital divide and access. Drawing upon literature concerning Latino-produced newspapers and ethnic media and a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis, she determines that her case study *La Prensa* possessed what she termed a "pro-Hispanic position" (85). She also claims that *La Prensa* projects the opinions and attitudes of Latin@ communities in San Diego and is therefore a viable alternative news source for Latin@s. Lastly, Rivas-Rodriguez is one of the few scholars that frame the discussion concerning Latina/o-produced media from an alternative media perspective.

Furthermore, Cristal Beltrán's essay "No Papers, No Fear" examines the digital activism of undocumented Latin@ youth (2014). She sees the blogs and videos that these individuals utilize to "come out" as undocumented as a "queering of democracy" and a queering of traditional notions of blogging (241). The activism and media production of undocumented Latin@ youth also possess traits of alternative and activist media in the sense that these projects produce small-scale media that have strong ties to the DREAMer social movement. My discussion of Dreamers Adrift in chapter three will examine the alternative and activist characteristics of a project informed by DREAMer activism. Moreover, in a forthcoming essay, Mary Beltrán and I survey Latina/o-produced web

series and their Latina and Latino writers and producers (2015).[9] Our study defines Latina/o-produced web series as web media that featured one or more significant characters that were specifically written as Latina/o American, that feature Latina/o community settings in the narrative's story world, and that include among the production team at least one Latina/o writer or producer. We analyzed these series from a number of perspectives with respect to production strategies, funding, distribution, and content. The study revealed that the majority of these Latina/o web series were small-scale projects with low to no budgets that were invested in countering stereotypes of Latin@s, ethnic-specificity rather than homogeneity, and dealing with social issues. We argue that this new wave of producers create personal media of resistance and Latina/o-inflected hybridity. However, while we see that this current wave of Latin@ producers are concerned with creating media that is alternative and activist to varying degrees, these creators are also interested in reaching broad audiences and ultimately joining the television industry. Future scholarship should carefully consider questions of whether or not Latin@-produced media projects should strictly strive to work outside the mainstream or if they can also attempt to use their projects to join it and still be alternative.

Latin@ Publics and Counterpublics

I rely on Nancy Fraser's concept of subaltern publics and counterpublics in the hopes of demonstrating how Latin@ alternative and activist media constitute themselves in relation to U.S. mainstream public and in the process, develop, or rather publicize diverse Latinidades. I believe that Latin@ alternative and activist media and the Latinidades they espouse are largely informed by and critical of processes of racialization

and marginalization perpetuated by the nation-state and by mainstream media. As the case studies will emphasize, the aims of producers of alternative and activist media typically include gaining inclusion and recognition, challenging or contesting hegemonic order, or even to therapeutically engaging with hegemonic trauma, the symbolic violence perpetrated by anti-Latin@ discourses. Fraser's notion of a multiplicity of publics and counterpublics is also useful in critically thinking through the drawbacks of a singular "Latino public sphere." This Latino public sphere has been primarily described in terms of corporate led Spanish-Language media (Amaya 86). Instead, I believe that conceptualizing Latin@-produced media as operating within multiple Latin@ counterpublics and publics allows for a much more nuanced discussion, especially when one takes into consideration the wide range of Latin@ identities along axes of difference. For instance, studying *Latino Rebels* affords the opportunity to examine media seeking to represent a pan-ethnic, transnational Latin@ identity, while Dreamers Adrift's work reflects the creative expression of undocumented Latin@s. In many respects, the move towards multiple Latin@ counterpublics is also an attempt to disrupt the English-Spanish binary that seems to have developed within Latino/a studies.

Furthermore, the intense focus on corporate Spanish-language media within Latino media studies has contributed to the erasure of histories/herstories of Latin@ creative expression that have emerged from and contributed towards kindling specific social movements. From radical Puerto Rican and Cuban exile print media in the 1930s (Lao-Montes 2002) to the recent blogging and circulation of YouTube videos of Latin@ youth "coming out" as undocumented (C. Beltrán 2013), Latin@-produced media have

often been financed by the Latin@ producers themselves, typically on shoestring budgets. Moreover, they have been less profit driven than corporate English-language and Spanish-language media. Instead, their goals have been more about circulating information within their communities, engaging in political debate, and providing a space for publicizing Latin@ literature, art, and culture. Therefore, in addition to rejecting a notion of a singular Latino public sphere, this thesis is also critical of scholarship that has been dismissive of small-scale alternative and activist media as irrelevant. I argue that such top-down critiques of alternative media fail to see the ground-level impacts and effects of participating in the making and consumption of these media and deny the producers and consumers, who we should recognize as political beings, of agency. My thesis acknowledges the agency and contributions of alternative and activist media projects such as *Latino Rebels* and Dreamers Adrift and the ways they critique various parts of mainstream culture. It recognizes the scholarly value in investigating the alternative content and processes of these small-scale projects.

Public sphere theory is a useful theoretical framework for examining alternative and activist media. More specifically, I believe Nancy Fraser's concept of *subaltern counterpublics* (1992) serves as an appropriate framework for the study of Latin@ alternative and activist media. Discussing Latin@ alternative and activist media in terms of subaltern publics appropriately demonstrates a) the diversity of Latin@ ideologies and creative expression, and b) the interaction and relationship between individual Latin@ alternative and activist media to other Latino and non-Latino media and publics as well as to the mainstream public sphere.

Any discussion of public sphere theory usually begins with Jürgen Habermas' *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, in which he posited a concept of a unified public sphere.[10] Habermas states that the primary function of a public sphere is to serve as a space for public debate and discussion, and by extension to maintain the power of the state, and uphold democracy. This concept however, has been met with a mixture of criticism. The two main critiques of Habermas' theorization of such a public sphere are that he a) idealizes the bourgeois public sphere, and b) that he "brackets" social inequalities and disregards the manner in which women and working class individuals are largely excluded (Calhoun, 1992; Fraser, 1992). Habermas' initial formulation of the public sphere failed to adequately acknowledge the manner in which power is exercised via capitalism, patriarchy, and racism in a public sphere controlled by white male normativity (Squire, 2002; Siapera, 2010). However, some theorists have upheld Habermas' notion of a unified public sphere despite its flaws (Garnham, 1992). Downing and Husband (2005), for instance, accept Habermas' notion of an unified public sphere, utilizing the theory in order to stress the importance of minorities' "right to communicate" and advocating for the creation of inclusionary policies by the state to develop minority communications. Others, on the other hand, have critiqued and expanded upon the concept, fostering new ideas and debates concerning the proliferation of public spheres created by excluded and/or subordinated groups (Felski, 1989; Fraser, 1992; Negt and Kluger, 1993).

Expanding upon Habermas' initial theorization of a unified public sphere, Nancy Fraser argues that in reality the public sphere consists of a multiplicity of counterpublics

(1992). Fraser conceptualizes counterpublics as parallel discursive arenas where those excluded from dominant discourses "invent and circulate counter discourses, so as to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (116). She also states, "that members of subordinated groups— women, people of color, and lesbians and gays – have repeatedly found it advantages to constitute alternative publics" (116). Fraser identifies these parallel discursive spaces as *subaltern counterpublics*. Considering the marginalization of Latin@s by the dominant mainstream public, I argue that Latin@ alternative and activist media can be thought of as counterpublics that invent modes of speaking directly to their communities and create content that oppose the hegemonic order of the mainstream.

However, Michael Warner has cautioned against the use of the term subaltern counterpublic and advocates instead for the term counterpublics. Warner contends that counterpublics also possess an awareness of their subordinated statuses and are structured differently by various sets of dispositions and protocols. I align myself with Warner's phrasing in order to disrupt the unequal power relation between dominant and subaltern, and the unbalanced comparison between the two in terms of style, strategies, and impact. Furthermore, I believe that any study of Latin@-produced media should acknowledge the way power operates within Latin@s communities and social networks. We must push ourselves to constantly question who gets to speak on the group's behalf. Latin@ alternative and activist media can therefore be understood as representing counterpublics and/or publics that represent a wide range of perspectives and ideologies that transgress identity boundaries and physical borders. It is through their constant production and

circulation of texts that Latino alternative and activist media formulate counterpublics/publics that can contest the hegemonic constructions of Latin@s and Latinidad. These Latin@ counterpublics also sustain imagined communities as they appeal to a common sense of oppression and experiences and shared values and political goals among individuals of Latin American descent in their content production. They vary in their struggles, agendas, organizational forms and strategies, and ideologies but coexist parallel to the mainstream nevertheless.

I am weary of scholarship such as Amaya's that posits a singular and separate "Latino public sphere" (120). Amaya's Latino public sphere seems to have an intense focus on corporate Spanish-language media.[11] Yes, it is true that more than half of Latin@s regularly consume Spanish-language media, however, the fact remains that 67 percent of these individuals also consume English-language media at the same time (Statista 2012). However, defining a Latino public sphere in terms of language is slippery work and dangerous because we run into the risk of upholding an English-Spanish binarism. I have noted, as have other scholars such as Arlene Davila (2009, 2013), that the perpetuation of an English-Spanish binary in many Latin@-focused studies often do more harm than good in the sense that the perpetuation of this binary often casts Latin@s as a homogenous group of Spanish speakers, disregarding a) Latin@s who as a result of xenophobic and U.S. nationalist ideologies and policies, do not speak Spanish, b) those who speak colloquial or hybrid Spanish that is nationality, regional, and/or class specific, c) Latin@s who speak Portuguese, and d) Latin@s who speak Indigenous languages. These various modes of speaking are essential to fully understanding how certain Latin@

alternative and activist media express their cultural and political perspectives, address their communities, and ultimately constitute themselves as publics. Therefore, I argue that theorizing Latin@ alternative and activist media (and Latin@ media more generally) as multiple counterpublics and publics is more conducive for studying the expressions of a group as diverse as Latin@s.

Case Studies and Methods

In the following chapters I will examine two case studies, *Latino Rebels* and Dreamers Adrift as examples of Latin@ alternative and activist media. There were a number of factors that motivated my selection of case studies. The most straightforward reason is that *Latino Rebels* and Dreamers Adrift are two independent Latin@ media projects that I am acutely familiar with. I have followed their work closely these past few years and therefore, I felt the most comfortable studying these collectives. Additionally, I believed the similarities and differences between the two projects afforded an opportunity to demonstrate some of the common strategies evoked by Latin@ alternative and activist media producers, as well as the diverse experiences and identities expressed in Latin@ alternative and activist media. Some of the similarities between *Latino Rebels* and Dreamers Adrift include: both projects utilize a wide range of formats (blogging, video, and podcasts) and platforms (Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube), both operate on shoestring budgets – limited or small amounts of money to spend, and in both cases, the practitioners view themselves as collaborators, as a collective. Furthermore, *Latino Rebels* and Dreamers Adrift chiefly rely on satire and humor in their content to achieve their goals: to deconstruct stereotypes and to tell their own stories. However, at the same

time these collectives are distinct from one another. For instance, *Latino Rebels*' content posits a pan-Latin@ identity and aligns itself with a multitude of Latin@ and Latin American struggles for liberation, while Dreamers Adrift possesses ties to specific social movements (DREAMers and Undocuqueers) and creates representations of undocumented immigrant identity.

Another reason behind my selection of case studies involves the manner in which both *Latino Rebels* and Dreamers Adrift have remained active over the course of four years and have maintained relevancy and esteem within Latin@ and activist networks. Though it is difficult to determine with certainty the readership/audience of either project, a look at their Facebook and Twitter profiles provide some indication of the number of users accessing their content. *Latino Rebels*'s Facebook page has a total of 61, 819 likes and its Twitter profile possesses about 30,300 followers. Furthermore, according to Alexa rankings, *Latino Rebels* is one of the top independent Latin@ media sites on the web, and currently ranks higher than more mainstream Latino-oriented webpages such as *NBC Latino*. A slightly more obscure group, Dreamers Adrift's Facebook page has a total of 2,645 page likes and possesses 1,088 Twitter followers. Though Dreamers Adrift's numbers are small in comparison to *Latino Rebels*, the collective has gained scholarly recognition and its members have participated in conferences and university talks concerning its creative work and DREAMer activism.

Furthermore, in order to develop a research design for examining my case studies I first consulted existing literature on alternative and activist media to get a sense of what the most appropriate method and unit of analysis for studying these kinds of media.

However, I learned that scholars have engaged in a number of different methodological approaches. As I am primarily concerned with how *Latino Rebels* and Dreamers Adrift make sense of themselves and the rest of the world and the manner in which their ideologies manifest in their content, I decided to take a qualitative approach involving the use of textual analysis and discourse analysis to interpret both *what* is being said and *how* things are being said. I began by carefully examining the projects' websites holistically to determine their recurring themes and preferred formats. I then chose textual evidence to analyze that I believed was representative of *Latino Rebels* and Dreamers Adrift's organization, production, and content. This textual evidence included text-based posts and videos. For instance, I looked to the about and contact pages of both websites for insight into how these projects describe themselves and their missions. I then proceeded to engage in textual analysis and discourse analysis to interpret the kinds of narratives and ideological messages *Latino Rebels* and Dreamers Adrift espouse. As Bonnie Brennen states, "textual analysis is all about language, what it represents and how we use it to make sense of our lives" (2012, 192).

My utilization of textual analysis affords the opportunity to hypothesize how the characteristics and structure of *Latino Rebels* and Dreamers Adrift's content inform the messages they disseminate. Additionally, by employing a discourse analysis I will examine the ways in which the contributors of *Latino Rebels* and Dreamers Adrift choose to speak and/or write. Therefore, I will also conduct close readings of the language used in these collectives' speeches and/or writings in order to uncover the expressed ideologies. Through a combination of textual analysis and discourse analysis of these

Latin@ collectives' content I determine the manner in which these groups create spaces to expose, resist, and negotiate hegemonic discourses and practices, as well as to discuss difficult issues concerning identity.

Chapter 2 discusses *Latino Rebels* as an alternative journalism website that is primarily concerned with redressing the homogenization of Latin@s in mainstream culture. In this chapter I investigate the ways *Latino Rebels* characterize the media collective's organization, production processes, goals, and ideologies. I also examine the alternative and activists characteristics of *Latino Rebels*' content. Ultimately, I argue that *Latino Rebels'* content deals with themes of social justice, activism, and politics and contributes to the constitution of a Latin@ counterpublic that expresses a pan-Latin@ identity. It is my hope to put *Latino Rebels* into conversation with the practices and representations of Latin@s of both mainstream news media and past examples of Latin@ radical/alternative presses. Chapter 3 looks at the collective Dreamers Adrift and its video sketches, vlogs, and music video. This chapter attempts to demonstrate the ways Dreamers Adrift' content is informed by DREAMer activism that takes on a more radical or confrontational stance than DREAM Act advocacy that promotes a good immigrant versus bad immigrant account of migration. In addition to determining the alternative and activist qualities of the collective's organization, production, and goals, the chapter will look specifically at Dreamers Adrift's web series, *Undocumented and Awkward* (2011-2012), in which I argue that through the practice of participatory storytelling, Dreamers Adrift create therapeutic spaces for dealing with anger and depression associated with many of the experiences of undocumented youth. I also posit that through the creation of

videos sharing personal experiences, the collective participates in a DREAMer public sphere.

Chapter 2: Un Grito Rebelde[12]

In the United States, it is a common belief that reading or watching the news on a regular basis is important to staying informed, that news is a reflection of society. However, what if you were excluded from this reflection? Imagine opening up *USAToday* or watching CNN and rarely encountering stories that reflect the realities and complexities of your life. As a brown, queer Latina, I myself do not have to struggle to envision this scenario. For many marginalized communities this exclusion from mainstream news media, often regarded as "the national news," is all too real. With little access to or power in the mainstream, we have little control over the dissemination of news and information, or the discourses or representations they espouse. In response to what Chris Atton and James F. Hamilton describe as an "imbalance of media power," underserved groups have developed alternative presses as a means of prioritizing the needs and interests of their communities.

To most Latin@s it would not come as a shock to hear that mainstream news media have generally excluded us from participating in the newsroom while simultaneously casting us as villains and criminals. Whether we tune in to watch the news or read newspapers, we continue to see Latin@s as gang members who disrespect the law or as "illegal aliens" threatening the American way of life, but more often than naught, we are simply not present. We are neither seen nor heard. Throughout time Latin@ producers of English and Spanish-language radical and alternative journalism have sought to redress mainstream news media's racialization of Latin@s and our

exclusion from the nation. For instance, the creators of the alternative journalism website, *Latino Rebels*, have stated:

> We're placed in one big pot of BROWN, with no distinction and no respect. In no way will we silence ourselves or what we stand for. We will not dumb ourselves down and stoop to the levels at which we are treated, but we will exceed your expectations.
>
> This is our reality. This is why we have to make our voices heard. No one will do it for us (Latino Rebels 2012).

The exasperated tone of this passage reflects the frustration of the contributors of *Latino Rebels*, los Rebeldes, with the imbalance of media power that continues to result in the homogenization and marginalization of Latin@s by the mainstream.[13] It also conveys their belief that there is a need to provide news, entertainment, and social commentary regarding "Latino issues" that are told from a Latin@ point of view for a Latin@ audience, or rather community. Los Rebeldes attempt to remedy this imbalance by being in charge of their own narratives and images, by constituting a public that bolsters Latin@ voices.

It is then the goal of this chapter to examine the alternative characteristics of *Latino Rebels*' content, collective practices, and ideologies in relation to the mainstream. Therefore, for this study I will draw on Atton and Hamilton's work concerning alternative journalism and, more specifically their position that any analysis of alternative journalism should consider how its practices and ideologies regarding the making of journalism and society, relate to those of the dominant mainstream. The manner in which los Rebeldes organize themselves as a non-hierarchical collective, such as through authoring content under the collective name, Latino Rebels, in addition to the counter-hegemonic nature of

the content, are some of the practices that I argue make *Latino Rebels* alternative and activist media. Using a combination of textual analysis and discourse analysis, this chapter will examine the manner in which *Latino Rebels*' vision of itself as the "Latino Daily Show" manifests throughout its content and the way it discursively positions itself as alternative journalism.[14]

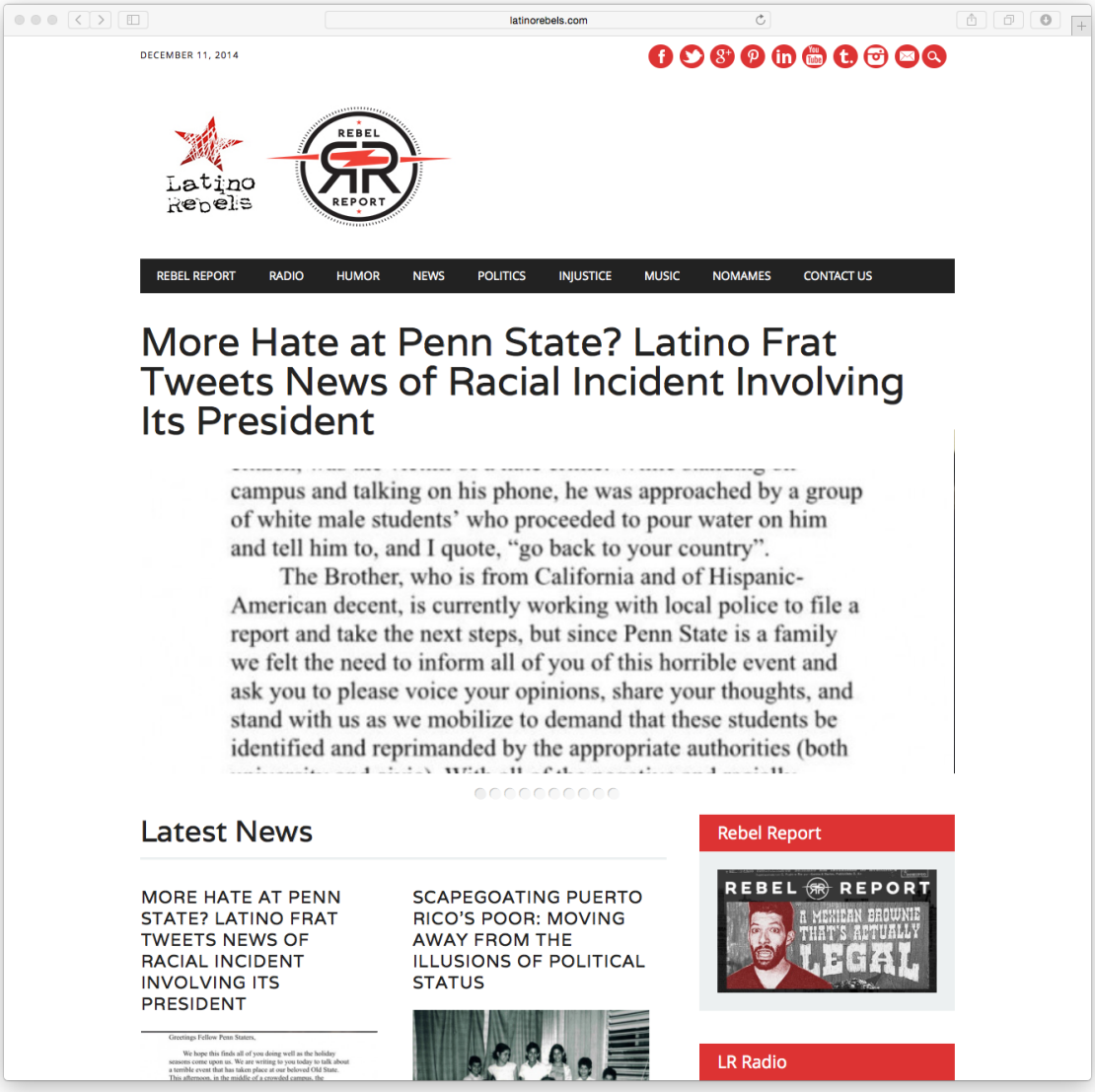

Figure 1: Screenshot of *Latino Rebels*' Homepage on December 11, 2014.

While I recognize that no generalizations can be made from one case study, I hope that by examining *Latino Rebels* as alternative journalism it may demonstrate the ways in which Latin@-produced news, generally referred to as racial and ethnic minority media, can inform current understanding of alternative and activist media. Unsurprisingly and despite our legacy of alternative and radical presses, Latin@s have been largely excluded from studies regarding alternative journalism and even more broadly excluded from alternative and activist media discussions -- most of which have been primarily focused with white middle-class activism than the struggles of people of color (Morales 324). This exclusion of Latin@-produced journalism from alternative media studies may in part be due to a reluctance to classify media organized around an ethnic identity as alternative. Case studies such as *Latino Rebels* afford the opportunity to discuss the ways in which racial and ethnic minorities create media publics for their voices and narratives to be heard and considering the destructive nature of hegemony to render racial and ethnic minorities voiceless and invisible, I would argue that their mere existence is radical in itself. However, their approaches to organizational and production and social-historical contexts should be carefully examined for instances of alternativeness and/or activism. Additionally, in this chapter, I argue that *Latino Rebels* posits a pan-Latino and politically and socially conscious version of Latinidad. However, before I continue my analysis, I will provide an overview of the current mediascape of mainstream news media's representation and employment of Latin@s. Research concerned with Latin@-produced alternative and activist media stands to benefit from contextualizing the

practices of mainstream media in terms of employment and representation as it demonstrates the necessity for media made by and for Latin@s.

Latin@s in Mainstream News Media

Felix F. Gutiérrez is bold enough to call mainstream news media in the United States out for what it is, Anglo media. Mainstream news media aims to appeal to a general mass audience, to individual of various races, ethnicities, ages, and income. However, as Gutiérrez explains, this media is told from the perspective that ethno-racially White Americans are the norm, enforcing an "us and others" viewpoint that continues to result in "less than accurate images, reporting, and coverage of people of color" (100). The low number of people of color in creative decision-making positions exasperates the infrequent and stereotypical coverage of marginalized communities. This is especially true in the case of the employment and coverage of Latin@s. The issue of inaccurate and stereotypical coverage of Latin@s is something *Latino Rebels* made their primary concern, charging the mainstream as "so called patriots who are quick to spread lies about Latinos living in the United States" (Latino Rebels 2011). Los Rebeldes' association of the mainstream as "patriots" who spread false narratives of Latin@s relates to the notion that there is a separation between those in the mainstream and Latin@s. It is also reminiscent of the "us and the other" power dynamic that Gutiérrez identifies in the employment and coverage practices of mainstream news media.

Though it must be acknowledged that newspapers and broadcast stations have made efforts to recruit and employ Latin@s, as well as create content for a specific Latin@ audience as evident with NBC Latino and Fox News Latino, significant gaps and

concerns still persist. For example, while providing opportunities for Latin@ journalists and some coverage of Latin@ issues, the creation of these Latino-focused sections of online versions of national news media reinforces the separation between Latin@s and mainstream culture, and even more troubling, separation from the nation. Additionally, in the previous chapter, I discussed the low percentage of Latin@s working in U.S. newsrooms. These dismal figures continue to be reconfirmed in recent studies such as Frances Negrón-Muntaner et al.'s "the Latino Media Gap: a Report on the State of Latinos in U.S. Media" (2014). This study in particular documented that currently only 1.8 percent of television news producers were Latin@, and that of the top television news shows no anchors or executive producers were Latin@ (13). Moreover, even with the small number of Latin@ journalists, producers, and creative executives working in mainstream news media industries, scholarship concerned with news media's coverage of Latin@s have argued that Latin@s continue to be underrepresented as sources and subjects of news (Subervi-Vélez 2005; Correa 2014).

For instance, a study conducted by the National Association of Hispanic Journalists examined television news stories over the course of a decade (1995-2004) found that Latin@ stories accounted for less than 1 percent of all network news stories. Of these stories, 66 percent focused on crime, terrorism, and illegal immigration (Negrón-Muntaner et al. 13-14). Federico Subervi's forthcoming study regarding news story topics between the years of 2008-2012, however, reports that this percentage has declined from 1 percent in 2008 to 0.6 percent in 2012 (2015). Additionally, Felix F. Gutiérrez argues that when Latin@s are the subject of news stories in mainstream news

media they are typically negatively portrayed as threats to "the Anglo status quo" (102). In regards to mainstream news stories, Gutiérrez states that Latin@s often fall into two broad categories, as *problem people stories* and *zoo stories* (emphasis Gutiérrez's). *Problem people stories*, he explains, present Latin@s as either "causing problems for the Anglo society as gang members, drug dealers, illegal residents, or as besest by problems associated to being Latino," such as trying to learn English or attempting to make a better life for their families in a new land (103). Latin@s, according to Gutiérrez, are then either depicted as criminals or cultural others. The second category, *zoo stories* consist of news coverage that "display Latinos colorfully celebrating their cultures in ethnic specific festivals." In these stories Latin@s are featured adorning folkloric costumes as they sing, dance, and eat traditional foods (104), and offer little to no insight into the specific cultural meanings of these practices. As *Latino Rebels* explains:

> A lot of what we find on mainstream media is sugar coated or stereotyped. They find it easier to put on a sombrero on it and call it Mexican than to find out that Mexicans don't wear the hats on a daily basis (2012).

In her studying pertaining to the representation of Latinas in Spanish-language and English-language news media, Teresa Correa states that racial and ethnic stereotypes act as powerful framing devices, arguing that such framing devices can be used to segregate and subordinate racial and ethnic groups (2014). Correa also states that news media are important sites for the reproduction of racial and ethnic stereotypes due in part to society's perception that journalism objectively reports reality as it is. Mainstream news targeting general audiences (typically code for white audiences) reproduce stereotypes of Latin@s as social contagion – reflecting the fear and anxiety amongst U.S.

citizens (and specifically those who are racially white) that the presence of Latin@s and their languages and cultures will result in the destruction of the American way of life – and upholds white ethno-racial supremacy. Los Rebeldes believe that one way stereotypes about Latin@s may be combated is through the creation of alternative spaces for Latin@ participation in newsmaking. *Latino Rebels*' mission to "kill stereotypes" is similar in stance to past incarnations of Latin@ radical presses and alternative journalism.

Latin@-Produced News Media

It is due in part to the marginalization of Latin@s in the mainstream that Latin@s have created alternative spaces to discuss issues impacting their communities and home countries. These spaces sometimes express ideologies that conflict with those of the mainstream, demonstrating the existing tensions between Latin@-produced news and the mainstream. Additionally, Latin@ producers of immigrant, radical, and alternative journalism have developed meaningful ways to speak their audiences. Latin@-produced news is typically organized around specific ethnic or national identities and special interests. They can be transnational and/or local, pan-Latin@ and/or ethnic specific, political and/or activist in nature, and assimilationist and/or culturally resistant within mainstream, general, and alternative media spaces (Chabràn and Chabràn 1993; Rodríguez 1999; Gutiérrez 2014). Latin@ news media producers utilize the same old and new media technologies as their primarily white mainstream counterparts in their coverage of news. However, depending on the ideological stances of the producers, the organizational and production strategies, aesthetics, and discursive intent of Latin@-

produced news media can oscillate between working in strict opposition to or having a negotiated stance with mainstream media.

Latin@-produced news media "look through an insider's (Latino) eyes at Latinos and their lives" (Gutiérrez 104)[15] as they find a balance between serving Latin@s and their communities and marketing them as an audience (Rodríguez 1999). That is to say that they represent the perspectives and insights of Latin@s and their lived experiences that are generally far more complex in their coverage and representation than that of mainstream media – which has historically been hetero-white-male dominated and focused – while at the same time participating in democratic processes and the development of Latin@ critical thought. Furthermore, Latin@-produced news have played various roles over time, from acting strictly as business ventures to working in association with political movements and cultural organizations. It is important to note here that while Latin@-produced news media may exist outside the mainstream (which is undoubtedly English-language based), not all Latin@-produced news media is alternative and activist media. Alternative and activist media should be understood as media that promote an "alternative" or oppositional stance towards mainstream institutions or practices. So while Univisión may envision itself as serving the underrepresented group of Hispanic and Spanish speaking people, it does not provide a critique of the English-language dominant mainstream. Therefore, it is extremely important to take into consideration the way in which the Latin@ producers of news media envision the role they play in providing news and information in order to determine if they think of their projects as alternative and activist media. For instance, *Latino Rebels* is an example of

Latin@-produced alternative news that utilizes new media to provide content that represents a pan-Latin@ point of view that ideologically takes issue with the U.S. mainstream.

The history of Latin@ news media, and more specifically, the histories of Latina@-produced presses have been well documented in studies conducted by Rafael Chabrán and Richard Chabrán (1993), Nicolás Keller (1993), Ameríca Rodriguez (1999), and Felix F. Gutiérrez (1973; 2014), many of which have focused heavily on Spanish-language print media that are generally geared towards Latin@ immigrant communities and/or are ethnic and region specific.[16] Though technically these early Spanish-language presses did not think of themselves as "Latino," they represent a legacy of the cultural production of people of Latin American descent living predominantly in what is now the Southwestern United States but also the Midwest and East coast. These Latin@-produced immigrant and ethnic news media also demonstrate the long history of Latin American migration and settlement in the United States, as well as the existence of literate Latin@ audiences who consumed these media (Chabrán 1984).

While Latin@-produced news media is produced in various languages, the origins of Latin@-produced news media may be traced to the appearance of the New Orleans based Spanish-language newspaper, *El Misisipi*, in 1808. *El Misisipi* is widely considered the earliest example of Spanish-language journalism in the United States (Rodriguez 1999; Chabrán and Chabrán 1993), and therefore the earliest example of Latino-produced news media as well. Furthermore, the 25th anniversary issue of *La Prensa* is often cited as providing one of the first and most important documentations of Spanish-language

newspapers in the United States. The San Antonio-based newspaper reported that 431 Spanish-language newspapers were published in the years between 1813 and 1937, most of them produced throughout the Southwest but also in New York, Florida, Illinois Missouri, Pennsylvania and Louisiana (Chabrán and Chabrán 364). Spanish-language newspapers posed critiques of political affairs occurring in Latin America, Mexico, and the Caribbean. They also informed their readers of information regarding political and social activism and sometimes took on the role of defenders of the community, pushing back at abuse inflicted by state institutions (Gutiérrez 111). Mario García's book, *Desert Immigrants: The Mexicans of El Paso, 1880- 1920* (1981), is an early piece of scholarship that documents the manner in which the Spanish-language press served as a space for political activism and engagement with social issues. However, as Chabrán and Chabrán also point out, some of these Spanish-language newspapers promoted assimilation, advising their readers on how to adapt to the needs and expectations of the U.S. (1993). Additionally, scholars such as Clara Lomas (1978), Luis Leal (1985, 1989), and Charles Tatum (1982) have demonstrated how these early examples of Latin@-produced news media in the Southwest provided a space for the production and consumption of Mexican, Mexican American, and Chicano literary expression in the United States.

However, amongst these presses also existed journalism that was more politically radical in its content. Chabrán and Chabrán's survey of Latino news media is one of the few scholarly works that examine Spanish-language, English-language, and bilingual newspapers created by Latin@s (1993). Their survey also provides a brief overview of

Latin@-produced radical, alternative, and activist presses dating back to the 1920s. Many of these Latin@-produced alternative and activist presses were small-scale publications that were unabashedly critical of the U.S.'s presence and political influence in certain Latin American countries. Furthermore, some of these early examples of Latin@-produced radical journalism circulated news and information that was in opposition to their respective home countries' governments that they believed to be oppressive (Gutiérrez 112). Much like their non-radical counterparts, Latin@-produced radical news media was transnational in their coverage. Latin@ alternative and activist presses also served as communication tools for social and political movements such as the anti-Diaz movement in the years before and following the Mexican Revolution (1910-20), the social and labor movements within Puerto Rican and Cuban communities in the U.S. (1920s), and the circulation of presses led by Mexican and Chicana women – possibly representing some of the earliest Chicana feminist printed thought (Chabrán and Chabrán 375). Additionally, Ed Morales states that a number of Latin@ alternative and activists newspapers emerged during the Chicano and Puerto Rican civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s (322). For the most part, Latin American radical presses and cultural movements influenced these alternative and activist presses. Latin@ alternative and activists newspapers such as *La Raza* (1968) departed from the assimilationist agendas of Spanish-language news media and promoted radical stances that demanded U.S. society adapt to the needs of Latin@s. These presses were generally staffed by non-professionals and on a volunteer basis and deviated from the traditional production practices of U.S. mainstream and Spanish-language news media, such as featuring full-page illustrations in

their quest to reach individuals who may have not been literate. These alternative and activists newspapers reported abuse and discrimination, such as police brutality, and advocated for radical change of U.S. society (Guitérrez 112). Latin@-produced alternative news media acted as a means to organize and inform communities, as well as provided spaces for Latin@ art, storytelling, and poetry.

Latino Rebels is very much a part of this legacy of Latin@-produced news, possessing both similarities and differences in comparison to these presses. One similarities these news media possess is the creation of space for distributing Latin@ literature, art, and culture, and given the multimedia capabilities of the web, *Latino Rebels* is also able to share music videos and user-generated content made by other Latin@s. *Latino Rebels* and past incarnations of Latin@-produced news media served as distributors and curators of Latin@ creative expression, providing a space for these creative works to exist where they would otherwise go unacknowledged by the U.S. mainstream. Furthermore, *Latino Rebels* attempts to link its readers to Latin@ and Latin America political and cultural movements, promoting politically engagement amongst its constituency in a similar fashion as previous Latin@ news media. *Latino Rebels* also takes on the role of defender of the Latin@ community, much in the same way that some Spanish-language newspapers and radical presses from the 1970s did, such as through condemning racist stereotypes in advertising and taking issue with U.S. politics' disregard of Latin@s. However, unlike older incarnations of Latin@-produced news media, which generally organized around a specific nationality or ethnicity, *Latino Rebels*' content is representative of a pan-Latin@ identity. *Latino Rebels*' pan-Latin@

political ideology attempts to forge bridges between individuals of different Latin American nationalities and heritages. Its pan-Latin@ approach is supported by its utilization of new media technologies that affords the ability to reach a wider public as well as participate in transnational and pan-Latino networks. Despite their differences in regards to ideologies and goals, what both past and current examples of Latin@-news media demonstrate is the social and political engagement of Latin@ communities. They also demonstrate how over different time periods, Latin@s have sought to contest the demonization of Latin@s and fill the void regarding Latin@ narratives in mainstream news media.

Alternative Journalism

So, what is alternative journalism and how does it relate to alternative and activist media? Alternative journalism refers to the gathering and dissemination of news and information concerning public affairs that differs from the dominant practices of mainstream journalism. Like its mainstream counterpart, alternative journalism spans across a number of media. As Atton and Hamilton explain, "alternative journalism proceeds from dissatisfaction not only with the mainstream coverage of certain issues and topics, but also with the epistemology of news" (1). That is to say, alternative journalism is typically informed by critiques of existing ways of doing journalism as well as a desire to provide news and information that reflects the interest and views of communities that mainstream journalism often neglects. Alternative journalism, like other genres of alternative and activist media, provides critical perspectives concerning the shortcomings of mainstream media and/or the hegemonic discourses they espouse. They also possess

the capacity for transformative processes, resulting in the empowerment of ordinary people (Rodriguez 2001; Atton and Hamilton 2008). These individuals have varying levels of formal education and expertise in news media production. Additionally, they are typically organized and produced in non-mainstream ways such as collectively, non-commercially, and independent of the market (Atton and Hamilton 2008).

For many alternative and activist projects, the choice to remain non-commercial can present issues in terms of how these projects will financially support themselves over time. This is where the Internet may offer some benefits to producers of alternative and activist media. In comparison to other formats, the Internet may be a more affordable option for these producers in the long run and moreover, it theoretically offers them the possibility of reaching a wider public, or as in the case of *Latino Rebels*, a pan-ethnic and transnational public. Furthermore, while some are critical of the democratic potential of the web, there are others who argue that the Internet promotes "greater political participation among the disenfranchised" (Rivas-Rodriguez 2) and allows "for a greater variety of communicative styles, strategies, and functions" (Ford and Gil 202). And despite the visible presence of corporations online, it has not prevented the deployment of the Internet as a radical reforming tool for social-movement activism and cultural resistance (Ford and Gil 2000; Atton and Hamilton 2008). This has certainly been the case for Latin@ activist and media producers such as *Latino Rebels* who have gone digital in their quest to create their own spaces where they can tell stories they believe are important and represent specific Latin@ points of views. However, the question remains, how can we begin to examine these spaces? How do we study the alternity – the

alternative and/or activist characteristics of *Latino Rebels*, a website that specifically identifies itself as alternative journalism?

Atton and Hamilton suggest that in addition to studying the content of alternative journalism we should also take into consideration the motivations, attitudes, and goals of its practioners, that we should examine their production strategies and the manner in which these practioners' organize themselves (2008). One way in which we can study these characteristics is to determine how they may manifest in the practioners' content and then asking how they relate to the practices and conventions of the mainstream. Therefore, in order to develop a critical understanding of *Latino Rebels* as alternative journalism I will engage in textual analysis of the ways in which los Rebeldes choose to speak and/or write. Engaging in close readings of specific examples of the website's content such as its contact page provides insight into how this project describes itself and its missions.

Latino Rebels: #NoMames

Latino Rebels enjoys the distinction of being "The Latino Buzzfeed." Known for its very opinionated approach and tenacious ability to break news stories concerning Latin@s and Latin American countries, it has also earned esteem amongst online Latin@ networks and become required reading for anyone interested in Latin@ issues and media. *Latino Rebels*' readership and content has steadily grown since the website went live four years ago, evolving from a small satirical web page into a cross-platform independent media project. It actively covers events and issues predominantly concerning Latin@s that other mainstream outlets have not, posting anywhere from two to four stories daily

on its blog and across its various social media accounts. It is a leading Latin@ new media site that has managed to maintain its independence from commercial media. *Latino Rebels* is an alternative journalism blog that provides content that relates a pan-Latin@ point of view that is critical of U.S. mainstream culture and more widely, of oppressive societies and institutions as a whole. Its ideologies are informed by a pan-Latin@ and transnational Latinidad that directly shapes its content and the means by which they cover stories.

The blog was founded by Julio Ricardo Varela in 2011 after having made a name for himself as a social media blogger dedicated to discussing Latin@ and Latin American and Caribbean issues, specifically as it related to Puerto Rico. In that time Varela, gained a reputation for being outspoken. His success with his personal blog JulioRVarela.com signaled to Varela the growing need for Latin@-produced content and the opportunities the Internet afforded in providing such content (Rodriguez 2012). Varela's belief that at the time there was a need for Latin@-produced content is not unfounded considering that around the same time the blog was created U.S. census data reported on the growth of Latin@ populations, documenting the "browning of America." The year 2011 also marked the ten year anniversary of 9/11, amounting in a decade's worth of xenophobia and intense debates over immigration, much of it covered in mainstream news media, that persistently espoused anti-Latin@, and particularly anti-Mexican sentiment. The growing Latin@ population was and continuous to be framed as threats to the majority (Amaya 7). Varela also notes that 2011 "was a time where we saw a lack of English-language underreported stories in the U.S.-Latino community" (NPR 2013). With this context in

mind, I argue that *Latino Rebels* attempts to intervene in political debate and media coverage of issues concerning Latin@ communities, by utilizing the blog to participate in these conversations.

Goals and Ideologies

Varela, in an interview with Giuliani Rodriguez, explains that the idea for *Latino Rebels* developed after a night of "catching up on episodes of *the Daily Show*" (2012). He became intrigued with a Latino Daily Show-type webpage that bolstered a witty and humorous Latin@ vibe and would interact with the Latin@ digital sphere that was developing at the time. Varela then invited 25 of his friends to participate in the project with him (NBC 2014). These 25 rebeldes consisted of Latin@ social media bloggers, journalists, poets, and photographers of various ethnicities and nationalities such as Puerto Rican, Mexican American, Dominican, Venezuelan, Peruvian, and Central American (Latino Rebels 2011b). Varela states:

> The idea was to just start creating content that spoke to our world: bilingual, bicultural digital kids of the 80s and 90s. We didn't really have a plan: just to create new content, build a strong online community and continue to question/dissect/analyze/satirize topics that interested us (Rodriguez 2011).

Valera's notion "our world" is reminiscent of pan-Latin@ rhetoric and demonstrates how a pan-Latin@ ideology was an important factor in the initial formation of *Latino Rebels*, which I argue directly shapes *Latino Rebels*' content. Pan-Latin@ refers to the grouping together of ethnicities and nationalities from Mexico, Central America, Latin America, and the Caribbean. While mainstream institutions have had a role in crafting Latin@s as a pan-ethnic group, generally as a means of easily categorizing us and marketing towards

us, Latin@s have also utilized the idea of pan-ethnicity as a means of amassing political power and combatting oppression. *Latino Rebels* seeks to hail to a broad Latin@ community, its content creation then seeks to postulate a shared pan-Latin@ identity. However, there can be drawbacks in doing so, such as running the risk of essentializing Latin@s and ignoring how they differ by race, ethnicity, or class. Often times it appears that *Latino Rebels* is willing to overlook these differences and tensions regarding Latin@ politics for the sake of solidarity. This often results in debate among its readers in regards to identity, demonstrating the manner in which Latin@s participate in crafting complex and sophisticated notions of identity, solidarity, and belonging.

With its goal of developing a pan-Latin@ audience or as los Rebeldes prefers, an online community, *Latino Rebels* reports stories that pertain to ethnic-specific communities, pan-Latin@ issues, and various Latin American and Caribbean countries. For instance, in its first year, *Latino Rebels*' posted 1,097 stories. These posts were predominantly about Latin@s in general but also specifically concerned Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans. Some of *Latino Rebels* post also dealt with in-group politics, such as addressing colorism, anti-blackness, or anti-Mexicanness. These posts ultimately promoted a pan-Latino identity, arguing that there are more similarities than differences among us. Moreover, according to los Rebeldes, some of the blog's top stories were "One the 17th Anniversary of Her Death: We Share Our Favorite Selena Songs," "Comedian Katt Williams Lashes Insults at Mexicans During Phoenix Show," and "La Nueva 94 Reports That Shaquille O'Neal Insults Puerto Rico at All-Star Game Weekend" (Latino

Rebels 2012b), further demonstrating *Latino Rebels*' promotion of a pan-Latin@ Latinidad.

Furthermore, when *Latino Rebels* went live, it announced its presence to the World Wide Web in a post entitled, "The Rebels Have Arrived!!!!" The original post featured a photo of Emiliano Zapata and expressed its goal to "kill stereotypes" (Latino Rebels 2011). One example in which *Latino Rebels* attempts to challenge established stereotypes of Latin@s is in the post entitled, "The Latino Rebels Manifesto." From charging the mainstream with the stereotyping and homogenization of Latin@s to advocating for a pan-Latin@, multilingual, and bicultural identity, los Rebeldes tackles a number of issues in the post. Los rebeldes state:

> We would like to take the opportunity to clarify a few misunderstandings about Latinos and specifically, the Latino Rebels. We're not hard to figure out. In fact, we're just like you. Except for one thing: we're bicultural. We have one foot in each place: the United States and our origin of ancestry (Latino Rebels 2012).

In the post it appears that los Rebeldes are addressing non-Latin@ readers, suggesting that in addition to its pan-Latin@ audience *Latino Rebels* also seeks to address non-Latin@s. They are determined challenge the misunderstandings and assumptions of not only *Latino Rebels* and its contributors, but more generally the misunderstandings these outsiders may possess concerning the lives and experiences of Latin@s. While the tone of the post is confident, it is not overtly hostile; however, it does hint at los Rebeldes' frustrations with the generalization and demonization of Latin@s and their cultures at various points throughout the text. They charge the mainstream with reproducing stereotypes of Latin@s; by stating, "Latino Rebels represents the most progressive of

Latinos," los Rebeldes give themselves the authority to debunk these stereotypes. For instance, in paragraph three, los Rebeldes call upon a very common stereotype of the sombrero-wearing Mexican in order to expose the mainstream's lack of knowledge concerning Latin@s. In fact los Rebeldes spend a large part of the manifesto "educating" readers about the diverse and bicultural lives of Latin@s, including images of the British punk band, The Smiths and the Mexican alternative band Café Tacuba while arguing that "coming from Latin America, speaking Spanish and eating particular foods are traditions within our worlds but in no way does it limit our capabilities or experience in the United States." I believe that this particular post demonstrates one of *Latino Rebels*'s goals as alternative journalism – to set the record straight on Latin@s' transnational and cross-cultural experiences. If manifestos seek to state an individual's or organization's goals and/or values, then I believe that the one thing los Rebeldes makes clear in this particular post is their goal is to disrupt hegemonic discourses about Latin@s as a homogenous group. For example:

> We're placed in one big pot of BROWN, with no distinction and no respect. In no way will we silence ourselves or what we stand for. We will not dumb ourselves down and stoop to the levels at which we are treated, but we will exceed your expectations (Latino Rebels 2012).

The mention of a "big pot of BROWN" is likely a reference to the metaphor used to describe the assimilation of immigrants and fusion of nationalities and cultures into one common culture, specifically in regards to the United States, and arguably connotes the notion that the state and mainstream media have attempted to cast Latin@s as a homogenous group, denying them the existence of their unique cultures and experiences.

Additionally, the capitalization of the word brown suggests that Latin@s have been racialized as ***brown*** despite the fact that Latin@s possess varying skin tones, and represent a number of races and ethnicities. It is the mainstream's homogenization and racialization of Latin@s that los Rebeldes see as disrespectful and one of the motivations behind the creation of *Latino Rebels*. They reiterate throughout the post that they will not be silent, and in doing so los Rebeldes once again assert some of their goals: to challenge the status quo, to deconstruct stereotypes, and to educate. The manifesto is then a text in which los Rebeldes describe the stark reality of racism and discrimination that Latin@s face. They express their goal to redress the injustices committed by the mainstream by making themselves heard. There is a certain passion and focus that is expressed in "The Latino Rebel Manifesto" that is common among alternative journalism projects, particularly those centered around subcultural or marginalized identities and seek to fill a void in speaking to the experiences and perspectives of their communities (Atton and Hamiliton 2008). Therefore, I argue that the goals and motivations of *Latino Rebels* also reflect criticism of U.S. state, mainstream media and the hegemonic discourses they espouse. *Latino Rebels*'s mission to represent Latin@s more adequately and authentically is part of its identity as Latin@-produced alternative journalism -- journalism that is for Latin@s, by Latin@s.

Furthermore, another site that is telling of *Latino Rebels*' goals and ideological stances is its contact page. On the page los Rebeldes explain to readers who they are, what they do, and how they do it – but also who they are not and what they do not do. The page entitled "Contact Latino Rebels" reads:

> Our ideas for Latino Rebels came from watching way too many Daily Show episodes, being on social media way too long, listening to too much punk music and devouring the biographies of Zapata, Martí, Albizu, Menchú and so many other Latino Rebels from Latin American history (2015).

In many respects, *Latino Rebels*' contact page serves as a mission statement or manifesto. Generally, a website's contact page simply provides the individual or organization's email or phone number and may sometimes include a contact form in which users are prompted to submit standard contact information along with an additional message. However, *Latino Rebels*' contact page is primarily geared towards the declaration of los Rebeldes' goals, values, and ideologies. For example, in the first paragraph, los Rebeldes make associations between them and *the Daily Show with Jon Stewart* (1999+) and punk music, pop culture texts that are known for being stylistically and ideologically in opposition to the mainstream. With the mention of punk music, a genre and subculture known for its criticism of mainstream music, social class, and capitalism, los Rebeldes align themselves with the rebellious and unapologetic attitude of punk. Additionally, the reference to *The Daily Show* connects los Rebeldes and their content to Jon Stewart's brand of satirical news and political commentary that often takes issue with national news media. I argue that los Rebeldes' ideological ties to punk music and *The Daily Show* also shape the content of their media project. For instance, the stories that los Rebeldes authors typically take on a satirical and humorous tone in their commentary of U.S. politics and media culture as it relates to their treatment of Latin@s.

Moreover, another interesting association that los Rebeldes makes is to Latin American and Mexican intellectuals and political figures highly regarded for their

ideologies and roles in political movements that were opposed to what they saw as oppressive regimes in their respective times and countries. For instance, Emiliano Zapata was a central figure in Mexican Revolution and founder of the Zapatista movement while José Martí is known for his involvement in the Cuban War of Independence and his contribution to Latin American literature.[17] Furthermore, Latin American figures such as Martí believed that the formation of a Latin American identity was a necessity. This notion of a shared Latin American identity and history continues to inform certain pan-Latin@ ideologies. Los Rebeldes reference to these individuals reflects the strategies of past and present Latin@ political and cultural movements to claim these inspirational figures as part of a pan-Latin@ history of rebellion and desire for liberation (take for instance the countless murals in Chicano neighborhoods including the images of Zapata and Ernesto "Che" Guevara). The reference to Zapata and Martí also demonstrate *Latino Rebels*' pan-Latin@ approach to its content. *Latino Rebels*' contact page is then a space where los Rebeldes lay claim to a cross-cultural brand of rebellion or opposition that includes the *Daily Show*, punk, and Latin American figures in which they connotatively express to readers that their work is ideologically oppositional to the status quo.

Collective Practices and Funding

In the following paragraphs of *Latino Rebels*' contact page, los Rebeldes make statements pertaining to their collective identity. Interestingly enough, while the page indicates that the site is "owned" by Varela, los Rebeldes are quick to defend that *Latino Rebels* is run by no one person but rather "many people." In addition to Varela, Efrain Nieves, Tony Vargas, Bella Vida Letty, Charlie Vázquez, Tony Diaz, Odilia Rivera

Santos, Rodrigo Sanchez-Chavarria, and Charlie Garcia are some of contributors that make up *Latino Rebels* (Costantini 2013). Furthermore, in the contact page, los Rebeldes employ a rhetoric strategy of using plural pronouns such as "we," "our," and "us" throughout the statement in an attempt to promote the website's organization as a non-hierarchal collective, stating "we run this site collectively" and "we are new media site that reflects the world views of about 20 like-minded Rebeldes. We are a site about us" (Latino Rebels 2015). Los rebeldes seek to present themselves as a united group who possess similar goals and ideologies despite their differences in profession and ethnicity. Additionally, the use of "we" and us" also conveys a sense of subjectiveness and possessiveness and demonstrates the manner in which *Latino Rebels'* rejects the "formal" and "objective" conventions of mainstream journalism and to some extent formal writing. *Latino Rebels*' goal is not to report sanitized news and information for a general public, but rather to make and share content that reflects the interest and opinions of its Rebeldes. For los Rebeldes, then the creation of *Latino Rebels* is also a personal project. They are deeply motivated to redress the lack of meaningful journalism concerning Latin@s, asserting a desire "to elevate the issues that matter to *us* and *our* community" (Latino Rebels 2015, emphasis mine). Therefore, I argue that *Latino Rebels* take on a positionality that is in opposition with mainstream journalism and reflects the organization strategies of alternative journalism.

Furthermore, los Rebeldes also make mention of their processes in making alternative journalism in this text as well. They state that they decide on the content collectively and in a non-hierarchical fashion, sharing and discussing topics before

writing them. Utilizing a private online Google group that each member has access to, los Rebeldes share ideas for the project's future content ("Latino Bloggers" 2014). My survey of the blog also revealed that *Latino Rebels* maintained its collective identity as almost all its posts surveyed were published as "Latino Rebels" and consistently utilized the pronouns "we" and "us" through out the texts, staying true to its claim that the site's content is written collectively. These posts are similar to editorial articles that generally presenting the opinions of the writer and make up the bulk of project's content. They tend to be short pieces embedded with images or videos geared more towards linking its readers to developing events and information rather than the in-depth reporting expected in of mainstream journalism, resembling more of a Buzzfeed approach to content production. Therefore, I argue that *Latino Rebels*' collective decision-making and writing processes are characteristics of alternative journalism.

In addition to *Latino Rebels'* sense of collectivity, the project also bolsters its independence. "No one else tells us what to write about. We are not in any special partnerships with companies or organizations," may be read as *Latino Rebels* taking a jab at mainstream journalism, outlets whose content may be constrained by needs and beliefs of their corporate owners and/or sponsors and the overriding power of the market in the decision of what kinds of stories are told, what ideologies are represented, and what groups and cultures are demoralized, such as the cultures and populations of Latin@s. *Latino Rebel*'s "independence" is further emphasized with the statement, "we don't make money off this site." Atton and Hamiliton argue that alternative journalism's view that mainstream media or rather, and more specially mainstream journalism's failure to

adequately represent “truth” and “justice” is a typical critique from alternative journalists (4). Los Rebeldes seek to distance themselves from the corruption of cooperate-led journalism and media in the contact page of their website, emphasizing their values of remaining independent and producing their own content free of the market. In regards to funding, Varela has explained that he and some of the other Rebeldes fund *Latino Rebels* themselves, taking on side jobs such as running social media accounts for companies seeking to reach the 25 and under Latin@ demographic (Constantini 2013). In many respects, their participation in the marketing of Latin@s seems to contradict with the anti-corporate discourse that the *Latino Rebels*’ contact page adopts. It is then more likely that *Latino Rebels* and its contributors are open to partnerships with the mainstream and/or corporations. Therefore, I argue that “Contact Latino Rebels” is a text that demonstrates how *Latino Rebels* attempts to discursively position itself as alternative journalism.

What started as a blog collectively run by 20 people has since grown to a multi-platform media project with over 40 contributors (NBC 2014). In addition to the blog, *Latino Rebels* has expanded its format to include various social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr, an online radio show called *Rebel Radio,* and *Rebel Report*, a bimonthly online video series. *Latino Rebels* continues to provide political and social commentary, often calling for #NoMames, Spanish slang for "stop messing around," when los Rebeldes believe politicians, mainstream media, and even Latin@ organizations have stepped out of line. As one of the top independent Latin@ media websites, it is apparent that there is a desire for content that represents a Latin@ perspective.

Themes and Content

In my survey of *Latino Rebels,* I determined that media, politics, and immigration were the most reported on topics, while the use of humor, reporting cases of injustice, linking readers to activism were recurring themes. In its first year, the majority of the stories the site published concerned immigration, specifically in regards to immigrant rights activism, DREAMer activism, and anti-Latin@ policies. With stories such as "Meet the New Generation of Latino Leaders: The Dreamers Who are Changing the World and Keeping Hope Alive" and "It's Official: Arizona is Most Definitely the Saddest Anti-Latino State in the USofA," *Latino Rebels*' coverage of immigration attempted to inform its readers of injustice while also connecting them to social movements and activism attempting to combat these injustices. In order to determine if these themes and topics were present in *Latino Rebels*' current coverage of news events and information, I surveyed the *Latino Rebels*' main website during the month of November 2014. I choose November to examine *Latino Rebels* because there was a lot of activity in the Latin@ community that month, specifically Latin@ voting in the general elections, the protests in Ayotzinapa, Mexico, and immigration reform. These stories largely fit with *Latino Rebels*' main topics of politics and injustice. I found that the Ayotzinapa protest, Mexican public demonstrations expressing outrage at the Mexican federal authorities for its lack of investigation and interest in discovering the whereabouts of 43 trainee teachers who disappeared in the southwestern state of Guerrero, made up 31 of the 92 stories posted on *Latino Rebels* that month. The majority of the stories concerning the Ayotzinapa were geared towards sharing YouTube videos, Vine short

videos, and tweets posted by Mexican activists and citizens to keep national and global publics informed of the protests. The sharing of these activist and citizen-produced media on *Latino Rebels* demonstrates the active participation of its contributors in other Latin@ and Latin American network as well as *Latino Rebels*' interest to keep its readers connected to social movements and activism.

However, only two of *Latino Rebels* posts were in-depth articles and were written by individuals who had some sort of scholarly background in regards to U.S.-Latin American relations. For instance, Alice Driver, a filmmaker and writer with a Ph.D. in Hispanic Studies, served as a guest contributor with her article "Problems in Mexico? Blame the Narcos." In this piece, Driver critiques the Mexican authorities and media coverage of the missing students as "radical" and "gang members." She also criticizes the U.S. media's representation of Mexico and violence in Mexico as often conveying a sense of criminality onto the victims. Driver ends her piece stating, "We need to have a more nuanced discussion, one that acknowledges the U.S. role in Mexico and holds it responsible for being a part of the solution" (2014). Unlike much of the coverage of the Ayotzinapa by major newspapers and broadcast networks, Driver's piece is not concerned with the reporting of the events in Ayotzinapa so much as she is interested in engaging in a discussion of the political and economic relations between the United States and Mexico and contextualizing the disappearance of the 43 students and the mainstream media's negative representation of Mexico and its people within this history of power relations. She also adopts the less formal and subjective writing style of alternative journalism. Driver's piece is just one example of how *Latino Rebels*' content

seeks to posit critiques of the U.S. state and mainstream journalism. Furthermore, *Latino Rebels*' coverage of the Ayotzinapa demonstrations is evidence of its dedication to covering not only news and stories pertaining to Latin@s living in the United States, but also issues and news in Latin America, Central America, Mexico. Therefore, it can be argued that *Latino Rebels* bolsters a Latinidad that is transnational as well as pan-ethnic. As *Latino Rebels* aligns itself with the activism taking place in Mexico – or at least, presenting itself as in solidarity with the Ayotzinapa protesters through its repeated coverage, it also constitutes a Latinidad that values civic engagement and participation and shares in the commonality of oppression and injustice. While, it cannot definitively be said that *Latino Rebels* provided in-depth counter-hegemonic critiques or stories of the Ayotzinapa protests, it is still worth noting that the news site has sought to share the truth and realities in its sharing of content produced by the individuals acting in the protests rather than "parroting what Mexican officials announce," as Alice Driver charged the U.S. mainstream media with in her article.

Figure 2: Screenshot of *Rebel Report*'s title sequence.

Figure 3: Screenshot of the *Rebel Report* episode "Racist Round-Up," featuring host R.J. Aguiar.

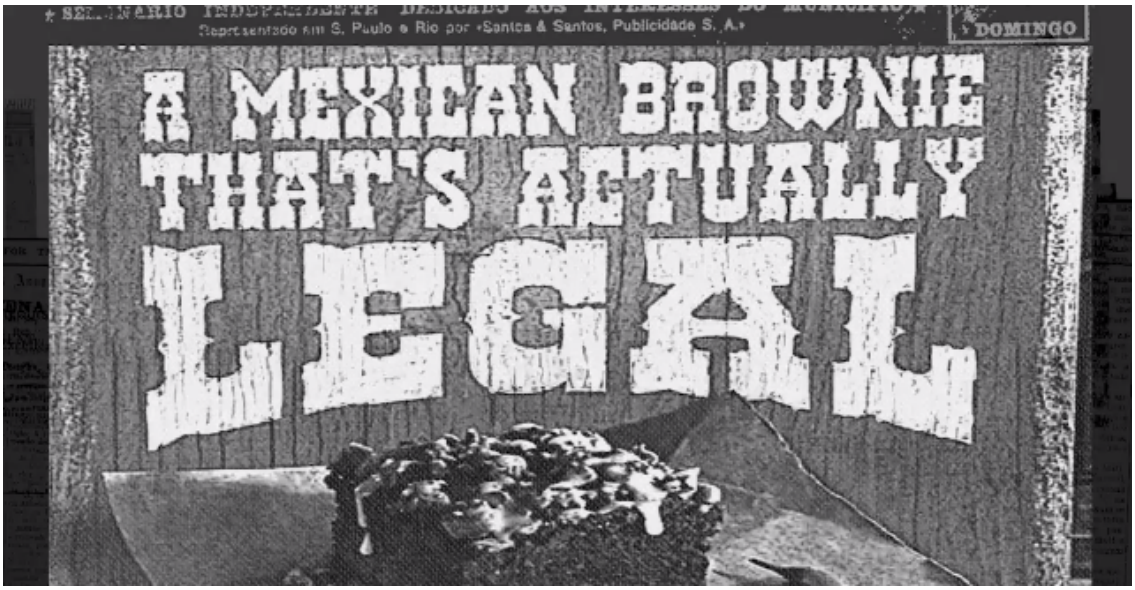

Figure 4: Screenshot of the controversial Mucho Burrito ad featured in *Rebel Report*'s "Racist Round Up."

Furthermore, *Latino Rebels*' content also demonstrated the heavy use of humor and/or satire. Satire has widely been use by cultural critics across various mediums as a means to pose social and political commentary and critique. This use of humor in the website's content fits with *Latino Rebels* vision of itself as "the Latino Daily Show." In the hopes of further establishing itself as "the Latino Daily Show," *Latino Rebels* have recently begun producing the web video series *Rebel Report*. The *Rebel Report* features R.J. Aguiar as its hosts as he runs through current events and news typically pertaining to Latin@s, Latin America, and sometimes other marginalized groups. Aguiar's presentation of news reports is similar to the way Jon Stewart reports "news" on *The Daily Show*, in that it often takes a satirical, sarcastic, and standoffish approach to reporting information. The show's use of humor is utilized as a rhetorical tool to critique mainstream institutions and media and the inequalities they perpetuate. For instance, in

November 2014, *Rebel Report* introduced the segment "Racism Round-Up" in which Aguiar quickly zips through recent examples of racism. In the segment Aguiar wears a cowboy hat and changes his voice to reflect a "Southern" accent, both of which are meant to signify the racist white Southern stereotype as he yells, "Well howdy. Welcome to Rebel Report's first ever Racism Round-Up. Where we wrestle up the most hefty forms of contemporary racism to get you good and ticked off." He goes on to report an incident in which a Canadian food chain, Muchos Burritos, used an offensive ad in the promotion of its food. The ad itself centered on the slogan "A Mexican brownie that's actually legal." Aguiar approaches the ad with satire, joking, "Wait does that mean they infuse it with weed? No? They mean it as an outdated racial slur from the 1930s? Ok!" Throughout the episode Aguiar's body language, which involves mostly eye rolling and head and hand shaking, and his annoyed and saracastic tone of voice work together to deliver a satirical reading of the news that postulates a critique of the role of stereotypes in perpetuating racism and xenophobia against Mexicans. The video is only about four minutes; however, it manages to deliver a brief history of xenophobia against Mexicans and other Latin@s in an attempt to contextualize the Muchos Burritos incident as well as educate its viewers on the ongoing racialization of Latin@s. Ultimately, I argue that *Latino Rebels*' content is primarily concerned with activism, social justice, and social criticism. This is evident in its pieces investigating racism in and outside Latin@ communities, commentary regarding the exclusion and stereotyping of Latin@s, and its solidarity with the Mexican and U.S. Latin@ activists during the Ayotzinapa protests. Therefore, I believe that *Latino Rebels*' should be understood as Latin@ alternative and

activist media as its content seeks to promote ideologies and activism that challenges the mainstream.

Conclusion

I believe that although *Latino Rebels* is a small-scale media project it actively participates in conversations about Latin@s and Latin America in ways that bigger, more mainstream outlets have, shaping these conversations to reflect a Latin@ point of view. It has maintained its reputation for being the first to break news and information and being heavily opinionated in its coverage. However, while *Latino Rebels*' mission is not to provide in-depth or "hard journalism," it engages in serious issues impacting Latin@s. From discussing racism in the Latin@ community to providing satirical updates of the ongoing failure that is immigration reform in the United States, *Latino Rebels* does not solely seek to report on "Latin@ issues," but rather to create content representing a Latin@ perspective.

In this chapter, I argued that the various elements and characteristics of *Latino Rebels* are alternative. While *Latino Rebels* is not "revolutionary" in the sense that their content does not clearly advocate a radical perspective or demand calls to action to its readers, it certainly is a media project existing outside mainstream institutions and networks and representing a specific verison of Latinidad. *Latino Rebels*' content is often humorous as it contends with serious issues of immigration reform, gentrification, and discrimination. This humor revolves around an "Us" vs "Them" rhetoric that typically presents the U.S. government and mainstream media as the "Them," as outsiders who know or care little about Latin@s and their realities. As a result, los Rebeldes positions

themselves as insiders, as legitimate producers of knowledge and information concerning Latin@s in regards to politics, social justice, media, and news.

This chapter has sought to examine *Latino Rebels* as alternative journalism in terms of its organization, production processes, ideologies, and its goals in addition to its content. I argue that *Latino Rebels*' collective identity, informal storytelling conventions, and the orientation of its content are indications of the site's positionality as alternative and Latin@. That is to say it expresses a specific Latin@ point of view of news, politics, and media. Additionally, I have argued that a Latinidad that is motivated by a pan-Latin@ ideology largely shapes *Latino Rebels*' content. Latinidad as a concept allows us to grapple with the ways some Latin@s make sense of being Latin@. For los Rebeldes, they believe that a pan-Latin@ solidarity is a powerful strategy for amassing political power and combatting oppression, as a means of making claims to identity and belonging. Also, *Latino Rebels*' support of various Latin@ and Latin American struggles for liberty reflects the los Rebeldes' pan-Latin@ ideology that is also transnational. It promotes a pan-Latin@ community that acknowledges diversity and difference, but ultimately finds strength in what they believe Latin@s have in common, such as similar histories of colonization, experiences of marginalization, and language. This is just one example of some of the complex conversations about identity with which Latin@s engage in their media production.

Latino Rebels believes there is a Latin@ digital space where Latin@s are sharing content and interacting with one another. While I agree with that belief, I would argue that there are in fact multiple Latin@ digital spaces, each emerging with their own ideas

of Latin@ identity and political ideologies and possessing various stances towards the U.S. mainstream. However, what many of these Latin@ digital media have in common is their goal to redress Latin@s' lack of representation and cover over their own images. They strive to succeed where mainstream media has failed, to accurately tell stories about Latin@s. In the following chapter, I examine another Latin alternative and activist media project that is also attempting to tell stories, to document the undocumented. I will discuss the alternative characteristics of Dreamers Adrift's production processes and content, examining its work in relation to DREAMer activism. Dreamers Adrift, like past generations of Latin@ artists and filmmakers, creates media as a means of participating within a social movement, as well as of creating spaces for dealing with alienation and exclusion.

Chapter 3: Sin Fronteras[18]

In a YouTube video sketch, a crowded room of anxious college students await their turn as a financial aid counselor calls forth the next student in line, to which a young Latino man steps forward and inquires about receiving an extension on his tuition payment. The counselor – who appears unsympathetic and irritated – states that the deadline has passed and implies that the student is irresponsible for waiting until the last minute. She then asks whether or not he receives financial aid. In an attempt for privacy, the student speaks in a low tone as he explains that he is an AB540 student.[19] Unfamiliar with the term, the financial aid counselor turns to her co-worker and asks, "Do you know what an AB540 student is?" We watch as the student becomes emotionally and physically distressed as the entire room hears the co-worker reply, "those are students who are *illegal*" (*Undocumented and Awkward*: Episode 12, 2012). This sketch depicts the forced outing of an individual who is undocumented – a individual who lacks legal citizenship – through the use of stigmatizing and demoralizing discourse that link undocumented immigrants to illegality and unlawfulness. However, the sketch, as an alternative and activist media text, also serves as an example of one of the many ways Latin@ DREAMer activists have chosen to push back at U.S. government and corporate institutions that seek to erase and silence their voices through the creation of online content.

The sketch is one of fourteen episodes in the web series *Undocumented and Awkward* (2011-2012), created by and starring members of the media-art activist collective, Dreamers Adrift. The collective was founded in 2011 by four undocumented

college graduates and is describes as "a creative project ABOUT undocumented youth, BY undocumented youth, and FOR undocumented youth" ("About Us" 2015). Dreamers Adrift's content is primarily digital video that comes in the form of music videos and web series, but also includes poetry and short blogging pieces. As the vignette demonstrates, Dreamers Adrift is interested in creating content that portrays the lived experience of undocumented people (King 2013). In the "About Us" page of the collective's website, Dreamers Adrift states it's principal goal:

> We are trying to document the undocumented. We're putting our life on display through videos, art, music, spoken word, prose and poetry. 4 Lives… 4 College Grads… Representing 1 DREAM for countless others (2015).

The collective appears to organize itself around the ethos of DREAMer activism and immigrant rights activism in stating that its goal is to depict the "awkward" experiences of undocumented immigrants living, working, and being educated in the United States through artistic work. In fact, much of Dreamers Adrift's content is based on the past experiences of the collective's members and audience. I believe that Dreamers Adrift seeks to address the "things that millions of others take for granted, such as driving to the grocery store or the ability to go to a bar to enjoy a nice cold beer after a long hard day at work" from the perspective of an undocumented person (Dreamers Adrift 2011a). I argue that the collective's connection to immigrant right activism and LGBT activism in addition to its organization as a small-scale activist project make Dreamers Adrift an important case study for discussing Latin@-produced alternative and activist media that have strong ties to specific social movements. The content of these alternative and activist media are then heavily shaped by the strategies and ideologies of these

movements. In the case of Dreamers Adrift, its content draws upon the "undocumented and unafraid" themes of the DREAMer movement. Additionally, studying this collective also provides an opportunity to discuss Latin@ undocumented political and civic identity.

Therefore, in addition to examining the alternative characteristics of the collective's practices, goals, and content, this chapter will focus on Dreamers Adrift, and more specifically its web series, *Undocumented and Awkward* as alternative and activist media that seeks to confront and process hegemonic trauma – the psychological and physical trauma imposed on individuals belonging to marginalized groups by the hegemonic order of the dominant. For undocumented Latin@s this includes the racialization and exploitation of their communities committed by capitalism, the state, and mainstream media. Anti-immigrant discourses inflict varying degrees of hegemonic trauma on both undocumented and U.S. born Latin@s. One way in which we have sought to overcome these traumas is through the creation of art and media to make our own claims of belonging to the nation.

I will draw on Clemencia Rodriguez's theorization of what she prefers to call citizens' media but what I have been calling alternative and activist media throughout these chapters.[20] Rodriguez's framework affords the opportunity to examine the transformative processes in participating in the creation of alternative and activist media. Ultimately, I argue that through the practice of participatory storytelling in the series, *Undocumented and Awkward*, Dreamers Adrift resist and negotiate its members' political and social marginalization as "illegal" while also creating a sense of intimacy. Morover, its role as alternative and activist media contributes to a) the strengthening of identity

based and social movement networks, and b) the creation of therapeutic spaces for addressing various forms of trauma, making room for healing processes that its members and audience may engage in.

However, while I do believe Dreamers Adrift's *Undocumented and Awkward* defies stereotypes of Latin@s and immigrants as socially, politically, and technologically inept, I want to make clear that it is not my intention to collapse undocumented identity under Latin@ identity. Undocumented people are of various ethnicities and nationalitites. Nor do I mean to suggest that immigration is a strictly "Latin@ issue." As Dreamers Adrift member, Julio Salgado, argues, "politicians have made [immigration] into a Latino issue. They have made it about Latino voting" (Seif 2014). However, a significant portion of undocumented immigrants is from Mexico, Central America, and Latin America, and I argue that their cultural production contributes to discussions of belonging and identity that U.S. born Latin@s also participate in. Regardless, it would be a gross mischaracterization to evacuate the political and social context of Dreamers Adrift's creative productions. I believe that Dreamers Adrift address the stigma and fear associated with being undocumented through the use of humor to name and represent their experiences. As a group made up of undocumented Latin@s, their creative production is geared towards work "*about* undocumented youth, *by* undocumented youth, *for* undocumented youth" (Dreamers Adrift 2014, emphasis my own). With this in mind I argue that Dreamers Adrift's *Undocumented and Awkward* is an example of what Lisa Lowe (1996) calls "immigrant acts." In her study primarily concerned with Asian immigrants and Asian Americans, Lowe states:

> The cultural productions emerging out of the contradictions of immigrant marginality displace the fiction of reconciliation, disrupt the myth of national identity by revealing its gaps and fissures, and intervene in the narrative of national development that would illegitimately locate the "immigrant" before history or exempt the "immigrant" from history (1996: 9).

Similarly, we may think of Dreamers Adrift's creative production as not solely a case study about Latin@ self-representation or alternative and activist media, but also an immigrant act in which the sharing of intimate lived experience via participatory storytelling serve as performances of labor, memory, and resistance. The political and cultural significance of the collective's content in question is that it highlights the contradictions of undocumented immigrants' marginality and disrupts dominant discourses that produce this marginality while also connecting its authors to a larger network of undocumented peoples as they contribute to the formation of collective identity and the mobilization of immigrant rights activism and Latin@ political/civic identity. Furthermore, we can also consider Dreamers Adrift and their creative work in series such as *Undocumented and Awkward* as a reaction against the fact that although some undocumented individuals have spent the majority of their lives living, working, and being educated in the U.S., they do not have full access to U.S. institutions that take part in creating policies and knowledge that impact their everyday lives. For instance, they cannot "legally" vote for government officials or for/against city and state policies. Nor do they have the financial means or direct access to mainstream media outlets such as news media that frame Latin@ undocumented immigrants as recently arrived, uneducated, and a non-English speaking homogenous group. Therefore, I would like to

begin by providing a discussion of the activism of undocumented youth in which I contextualize their struggle for educational reform and human rights within the large apparatus of immigration and the discourse of the "illegal" immigrant.

U.S. Immigration: Constructing Illegality

I begin by foregrounding the reality from which undocumented immigrant identity, and specifically Mexican or Latin American immigrant identity, emerges. This specific identity in the United States is largely shaped by immigration reform policies, public debates regarding definitions of citizenship, and mainstream media representations that casts immigrants as unlawful invaders and undeserving criminals through coded language used to refer to undocumented immigrants as "aliens" and "illegal." Sociologist Leo Chavez (2008) argues that immigration reform itself is a Foucauldian strategy of governmentality in which subjects are created through practices of governance; in other words: who gets to be and who is prevented from being a legitimate member of U.S. society is decided through the tight restriction of immigration and available paths to citizenships. Immigration represents not only a means of regulating the terms of citizenship and the nation-state, but also "an intersection of the legal and political terms" with racialized discourse that define immigrants as cultural and racially other (Lowe 11).

Leo Chavez also explains that Mexican immigrants, and by extension other Latin American immigrants, quickly began to be even further associated with the term "illegal alien" in the decade following 9/11 and the United States' "war on terror" that required the protection and surveillance of U.S. borders and in which the premise of Latin@ immigrant criminality centered on their "unlawful entry into the nation" (10).

Interestingly enough, this anti-Latin@ and anti-immigrant sentiment and xenophobia reemerged around the same time census data recognized the remarkable pace at which the Latin@ population was growing (Amaya 2013). Currently, the U.S. Census projects that the Latin@s demographic will double in size within the next fifty years, which would mean 1 in 3 U.S. residents would be Latin@ (United States Census Bureau 2014). It is little surprise then that in this past decade we have born witness to intensely strict immigration reform and public debate concerning citizenship, resulting in a "relatively mainstream nativism" (Amaya 5), the detention and deportation of thousands of undocumented Latin@ immigrants, and the racialization and homogenization of Latin@s as foreigners who pose a threat to the nation-state.

This association of Latin@ immigrants, and by extension, Latin@s, as "illegal" is produced through what Leo Chavez calls the *Latino threat narrative*. This narrative positions immigrants of Latin@ origins as unwilling and incapable of integrating into the national community and are ultimately a threat to the U.S.'s national culture. A look back into U.S. history and one will find similar threat narratives that have demoralized immigrants, generated anti-immigrant and alarmist news stories and punitive immigration laws. Therefore, we may understand "illegality" as socially, culturally, and politically constructed (Chavez 7). In 2005, we saw the move through legislation to criminalize undocumented immigrants when the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Border Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act (H.R. 4437). H.R. 4437 includes provisions such as the construction of a double-layered fence along the U.S.-Mexican border, requires the federal government to take custody of "illegal aliens"

detained by local authorities, and made it a crime to assist or provide aid to an undocumented immigrant. While this particular piece of legislation failed to pass at the Senate, it is largely considered one of the strictest anti-immigration bills to have passed by the House of Representative. More recently, the state of Arizona passed the anti-immigration bill, Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhood Act (Arizona SB 1070), which requires immigrants to carry their alien registration documents at all times and sets protocols for police to question and detain individuals they believed might be in the U.S. illegally. These immigration reform policies have shaped the nation's imaginary as to who can and cannot be a legitimate member of the nation-state. Or as Mae Ngai argues, "immigration restriction produced the illegal alien as a new legal and political subject whose inclusion within the nation-state was simultaneously a social reality and a legal impossibility" (2003: 4-5). That is to say that anti-immigration bills such as H.R. 4437 and Arizona SB 1070 have contributed to the criminalization of Mexican and Latin American immigrants (and Latin@s more generally) through its xenophobic language and restrictions.

Furthermore, the continuous media coverage and public debate regarding the U.S. Mexican border, unauthorized immigration, and the ongoing growth of the Latin@ population has also contributed to the racialization of U.S. born and undocumented Latin@s. As discussed in the previous chapters, Latin@s have faced exclusion from media outlets, have often been negatively portrayed by mainstream English language news media as a "problem people" and as criminals, illegal aliens, and terrorists threats within the last decade alone. If we take into account the lack of Latin@ narratives in

mainstream media, the argument could be made that the symbolic value of what representation does exist is extremely powerful. Latin@s, therefore, face what George Gerbner terms as symbolic annihilation. Latin@ immigrants and U.S. born Latin@s are symbolically annihilated by U.S. mainstream media in the sense that their lived experiences and voices are significantly excluded from the public sphere, while existing representations of Latin@s that are produced largely by and for non-Latin@s (specifically white people) contribute to the process of racialization. The mainstream media has profoundly shaped U.S. society's resilient association of Latin@s with unauthorized immigration and criminality and serves as an example of the pervasiveness of xenophobic and anti-Latin@ discourses. Hector Amaya has described the compound marginalization of Latin@s by state and media institutions as "the pushing down and the pushing away of Latinas/os" (3, terminology his). Amaya states, "the pushing down is done by discriminating against Latino participation in media narratives that problematize Latino life in the United States," while the pushing away includes the "processes of ethnic and linguistic balkanization that separate Spanish language media." He argues that through the pushing down (discrimination) and the pushing away (balkanization) of Latin@s, "the supremacy of ethno-racially white interest in political cultures and over the state" is secured (3).

Moreover, this pushing down and pushing away of Latin@s and more specifically Latin@ immigrants also results in real life consequences, especially for those who do not have legal documentation concerning their residency status. Scholars such as Chavez (2001; 2008) and Orner (2008) have each have documented the challenges undocumented

people endure such as abuse in the workplace, lack of legal protection, and living in constant fear of deportation and family separation. However, in addition to some of these challenges, undocumented youth face unique obstacles. While the increasing racialization and criminalization of undocumented immigrants impacts all young Latin@s, it is especially difficult for Latin@ youth who are undocumented. These youths are educated alongside citizen peers but must also simultaneously negotiate their restricted membership in a society that has culturally and politically cast them as "illegal" (Seif 2011). Due to punitive immigration laws and the failure to pass comprehensive immigration reform, younger immigrants are more likely than their older counterparts to be noncitizens and lack "lawful U.S. status" (Seif 61). In 1982, the United States Supreme Court asserted in the case *Plyer v. Doe* that undocumented children are "persons" under the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and cannot be lawfully excluded from public elementary and secondary education – kindergarten through grade twelve – on the basis of their legal status (Negron-Gonzales 2009; Seif 2011). In 2010, it was estimated that approximately 65,000 undocumented students graduate from high school ("The Dream Act" 2011), demonstrating that a large number of undocumented individuals were living and being educated in the United States. One significant piece of legislation was passed in 2002 by the state of California, Assembly Bill 54, which grants undocumented students who attended high school in the California the right to pay in-state tuition at public California universities and community colleges. However, despite this bill's move to offer undocumented students access to higher education institutions, these students are still left with the reality that they are not eligible for any form of state

or federal financial aid. Hinda Seif argues that the contradiction between undocumented youth's educational inclusion and exclusion in other social arenas plays a role in the day-to-day lives of these youth that intensifies with age and ultimately impacts their civic engagement (63). These youth also endure the constant vulnerability of deportation; thus undocumented youth are forced to hide their status and "live in the shadows" (Corrunker 2012; De Genova 2010). Furthermore, upon graduation undocumented youth experience "a traumatic change in status and identity from student to socially stigmatized 'illegal alien' and 'illegal worker'" as their options to higher education and work become limited due to their status (Seif 66-67). Scholars such as William Perez et al. (2010), and Arely Zimmerman (2012) have also noted how some undocumented youth struggle with depression brought on from isolation and living in fear of deportation. However, despite their marginalization from society and the mainstream, undocumented youth view themselves as Americans, as valuable contributors to the nation, and as possessing cultural citizenship. These undocumented youth constitute their own social movement and political identity as DREAMers.

DREAMer Activism

The term DREAMer signifies undocumented youth activists who campaign for the passage of the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. This proposed legislation would have offered the possibility of applying for a six-year conditional resident status to those brought to the U.S. under the age of 16 if they attended college or joined the military. These young activists are individuals are who migrated to the U.S. without legal documentation as children as well as those who came

with documentation, but due to the U.S.'s ineffective immigration system, were unable to renew their residency statuses. As Walter Nicholls argues,

> The immigration system imposed upon these individuals a similar experience and fate. This made them into a group that was distinct from other immigrants and nationals alike (2).

Therefore, we may understand the social and political identities of undocumented youth as DREAMers as being shaped and impacted by state institutions and pervasive discourses that cast them as illegals and inferior. Additionally, I argue that the imposed marginality of undocumented youth also influences the ways they challenge dominant notions of illegality, citizenship, and belonging. For instance, Lisa Lowe argues "immigration has simultaneously been the site for the emergence of critical negation of the nation-state for which those legislations are the expression" (8). That is, the state's construction of the "illegal alien" as a threat to the U.S.'s national culture may then also serve as a "generative site for critique" of this imagined national culture (Lowe 8). Lowe's argument is in line with studies that argue in favor of an understanding of immigration as both discourse and practice (see Chavez 2001, 2008; Negron-Gonzales 2009). Acknowledging the connection between immigration as discourse and practice pushes discussion towards considering immigration as "both material and ideological" (Negron- Gonzales 7). In other words, in addition to our discussions of how U.S. apparatuses and immigration policies function as a means of securing U.S. state interests through the restriction and regulation of immigration, such as limiting the number of immigrants and from where and by restricting pathways to citizenship, we should also consider how policies and discourses may impact the way people, and more specifically

for the purposes of this thesis, the way Latin@s develop their notions of belonging. I argue that Dreamers Adrift's creation of alternative and activist media that reflects the ideologies of the DREAMer movement is an example of immigration as material.

Advocacy for the DREAM Act began in the early 2000s and was initially enacted by leading immigrant rights organizations who saw an opportunity to revitalize their movements and gain new support for immigrants rights at the national level (Nicholls 13). Undocumented youth activists were supported by these organizations in developing arguments and strategies for mobilizing. These DREAMers participated in the 2006 immigrant marches across the country to protest the passing of H.R. 4437. DREAMers, many of them student aged, help spread information regarding the rallies via text messaging and online social networks (Seif 2011). DREAM activism escalated in 2008, when undocumented youth continued to be central to gaining support for the DREAM Act by "humanizing the plight of the undocumented" (Seif 70). However, DREAMer advocacy that emerged in the early 2000s was largely based on the argument that undocumented youth were "good, exceptional, and deserving immigrants" (Nicholls 127), perpetuating a good immigrant versus bad immigrant binary that upheld ideals of citizenship.

After the Senate's failure to pass the DREAM Act in 2010, undocumented youth activists began to shift their ideologies and mobilizing strategies away from the rhetoric of the good immigrant. These DREAMers began to restructure DREAMer identity as they took control over their own movement (Nicholls 2013). They participated in acts of civil disobedience, marches, anti-deportation petitions, public demonstrations, and

utilized new media to form online communities. Scholars such as Arley Zimmerman (2012) and Cristal Beltrán have studied the online activism led by undocumented youth, much it through video blogging and the creation of online networks on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr. These activists seek to steer the conversation away from the good immigrant rhetoric and avoid stigmatizing other immigrant communities through the use of the coming out campaign with. In coming out as undocumented, these activists take risks in putting a face to their movement, counteracting anti-immigrant discourses and languages that have continuously dehumanized immigrants. Additionally, in publicly sharing their undocumented status and experiences, these activists are able to foster a dynamic community. The unafraid and unapologetic themes of this campaign represented the ideologies of a faction of the movement that sought to be intentionally confrontational and critical of notions of citizenship and Americanness. The members of Dreamers Adrift have engaged in work that has reflected some of the narratives of the DREAMer movement and speak directly to the experiences of undocumented immigrants.

Coming Out and Participatory Storytelling

As I have previously stated, the personal and/or politicized cultural work of undocumented activists such as Dreamers Adrift serve as counter-sites to the U.S. national culture and discourses concerning the illegality of undocumented immigrants. Here I look to undocumented youth proclaiming their legal status and sharing their stories about being undocumented. A number of scholars have often utilized the "living in the shadows" metaphor to describe the forced invisibility of undocumented immigrants that

manifests from the high risks of exposing oneself as undocumented (see generally Chavez 2001; Seif 2010, 2011; Corrunker 2012). Despite the potential risk of publicly declaring one's legal status, undocumented youth continue to upload videos, write blog posts, and speak at rallies announcing or "coming out" as undocumented. As of March 2010, undocumented youth DREAM activist have organized annual coming out weeks in which they encourage fellow undocumented youth to voice their identities. The act of "coming out" is generally associated with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people's self-disclosure of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. It has sometimes been discussed as a psychological process, a rite of passage, or liberation from oppression, in which one feels pride instead of shame or social stigma (De Genova 2010). Recently, the expression has been adopted by undocumented youth as a means to take their own rites of passage towards "coming out from the shadows" and displacing the shame and fear associated with being undocumented with pride and empowerment. In the process of telling their stories, these youth simultaneously increase their visibility and agency while also connecting themselves to a larger network of other undocumented youth who share many of the same experiences and challenges (Corrunker 149).

Nicholas De Genova has discussed what he identifies as the utilization of queer politics in undocumented immigrant rights activism in the years following the 2006 immigrant rights marches. He argues that queer politics – which he identifies in the undocumented people's strategy of announcing their legal status – does not exclusively refer to a form of sexual identity politics, but rather, subversive acts that disrupt "the economy of normative" (in the case of undocumented immigrants, problematizing

normative definitions of citizenship) (106). De Genova also states that as undocumented immigrants answer the criminalization of illegality through the (re)claiming of identity in their activism, they produce labor that takes the form of a robust politics of identity. Thus, we may also understand the cultural work of undocumented youth user-generated videos of coming out or sharing one's story, such as in Dreamers Adrift's *Undocumented and Awkward*, as alternative and activist media. This specific form of DREAMer digital activism has been used as a means of mobilizing a politicized personal and collective identity, as well as an act of labor and resistance. This point is important to keep in mind, as the labor of undocumented immigrants is a resource that the U.S. exploits.

Furthermore, this chapter is concerned with the transformative processes that result from the creation of alternative and activist media. Arely Zimmerman's concept of *participatory storytelling*, which she describes as storytelling that intersects with activism within a new media environment, is useful in examining *Undocumented and Awkwards*' transformative processes for Dreamers Adrift's collective members and audience. Zimmerman explains that participatory storytelling occurs through the sharing of stories using social and digital media platform and that it has given undocumented youth the opportunity to identify and connect with one another online. She argues that sharing one's story involves high risk for undocumented youth, as they are vulnerable to deportation and further stigmatization. Therefore, collectively sharing one's story fosters an ethos of trust and reciprocity (39). While I see the theoretical potential in Zimmerman's *participatory storytelling*, the concept requires further development in order for it to serve as an effective critical lens through which to analyze the digital skills

and practices employed by undocumented youth. Therefore, I will attempt to set forth my own definition of participatory storytelling as the practice of sharing personal testimonies online by individuals seeking to share their stories in the hopes of virtually and emotionally connecting with others and developing collective identification that may carry on both in online and offline spaces, while also creating cathartic opportunities of self-reflexivity and healing. Though participatory storytelling occurs within oral and textual testimonies in the form of blog posts and user-generated videos, the digital practice is not limited to non-fictional creative production but may also include fictional work such as web series and web comics. However, as my study of Dreamers Adrift's *Undocumented and Awkward* demonstrates, even these fictional forms of participatory storytelling are autobiographical in nature, as they are spurred by the personal experiences of the authors. The stories and intimate stories undocumented youth share within new media spaces work to constitute community and complicate understandings of citizenship and belonging.

Dreamers Adrift: Changing the Narrative

The collective Dreamers Adrift is known for its artistic contributions to the immigrant rights movement and more specifically, it has participated in undocumented youth activism. It has earned a reputability for its mission to depict the experiences of undocumented people and deconstruct dominant narratives of citizenship, legality, and migration, often expressing some of the more radical perspectives of the DREAMers movement in the process. Despite the fact that Dreamers Adrift has remained a relatively small-scale media project, it has maintained relevance among Latin@ and immigrant

rights activist networks since its formation. This is most likely due to the continuous involvement and artistic contributions to social movements by the members of the collective.

Jesus Iñiguez, Julio Salgado, Fernando Romero, and Deisy Hernandez formed Dreamers Adrift in 2010 around the same time that the DREAM Act was being debated in the Senate. Each was in their mid-twenties, undocumented, had recently completed a four-year college degree, and knew first hand the difficulties in being an undocumented person seeking higher education. Although they were neither students nor youths at the time that DREAMer activism was at its height, the coming out of undocumented youth and the manner in which they were attempting to change the narrative inspired them to participate in the movement. In an interview with Nia King, Salgado states:

> At first when I started doing a lot of the images, when the students started coming out, I felt what they were doing was historical. The fact that they were changing the narrative, they were saying we're undocumented, we're unafraid. A lot of them were queer and being very open about both identities. It took me like 9 and half years to graduate but I finally graduated and the year that I graduated all this action started happening in 2010. And the way the media was covering it … like they would show up, take a picture, write their story, get their paycheck and move on and there was no depth into a lot of the stories. There was no analyzing, like why were the students doing it. I didn't seem them in any stories about that. It was just about "illegal aliens" trying to get rights, and still calling us illegals. And so to me, I was like, "we need to document this but it has to be from our voice." We're the ones who should be creating the documentation, you know documenting all this stuff (King 2013).

Salgado identifies one of his own motivations for participating in the DREAMers movement as feeling compelled to redress the mainstream media's failure to capture the nuances and historical significance of the movement and the young people behind it. His statement also slightly reveals a criticism of mainstream journalism as non-critical, non-

personal, and as perpetuating the perspectives of the dominant, in this particular case, that undocumented immigrants are criminals and alien to the nation. Salgado belief that undocumented people should be in control of their own images and stories is in line with other alternative and activist media projects that seek to highlight the voices of underrepresented communities. Furthermore, this desire to document the DREAMers movement was a common goal that would unite the members of Dreamers Adrift.

Originally the members of Dreamers Adrift sought to create a website for undocumented students to record and share their stories. However, creative and ideological differences between the members who were undocumented and those who were citizens caused the project to fall through, forcing Dreamers Adrift to take another direction that would allow them to represent the DREAMers movement from the perspectives of DREAMers themselves (Lopez 2012). As recent college graduates at the time, the members of the collective found themselves in positions in which they could not fully utilize their degrees to acquire jobs due to their lack of legal residency status and therefore identified with DREAMers movement.

> It started as a collective of four undocumented students after that project fell through. And the name "Dreamers Adrift" - "Dreamers" of course for the DREAMers, and "Adrift" because after the project fell through we sort of felt like we were just drifting. We had just graduated from college, we were having crappy jobs, and we wanted to continue to do something creative, and we felt that our dreams were adrift (King 2013).

Dreamers Adrift was then created as a creative outlet for Salgado, Iñiguez, Romero, and Hernandez to express their anger and sadness with the stalled state of their dreams (largely due to the U.S.'s immigration system), in addition to it being a way for them to

participate in the DREAMers movement. Through the creation of online videos, Dreamers Adrift gives visibility to the experiences of undocumented people that is often ignored by mainstream media and state institutions. Additionally, the majority of Dreamers Adrift's videos involve art, original music, and performance. With this in mind, Dreamers Adrift's mission to document the undocumented through art and media resembles the goals of previous generations of Latin@ artists who created art, performance art, and film in relation to their involvement in social movements. For instance, many of the Chican@ and Puerto Rican poets, artists, and filmmakers of the 1960s and 1970s were involved in social movement organizations and were determined to address the ways in which their communities were stigmatized and excluded from mainstream society, their work then acted as both personal art and social commentary. Similarly, Dreamers Adrift's online videos provide social commentary in regards to citizenship and immigrant rights, contributes to the visual culture of undocumented immigrants, and espouses some of the ideologies of the DREAMers movement while simultaneously serving as the personal expression of its members.

Moreover, in many respects Dreamers Adrift's web series *Undocumented and Awkward*, *UndocCribs* (2011), *The Bad Jotos Club* (2012), and *Osito* (2014-) are similar to the kind of performance work done by El Teatro Campesino, a performance collective that formed in 1965 as an artistic component of the farmworkers' strike in California. El Teatro Campesino reworked dominant perspectives of immigrants in its dramatic and satirical skits. Many of the initial performers of El Teatro Campesino were immigrants who through their participation in the collective, created spaces for expressing their anger

or sadness (Ontiveros 136). Randy J. Ontiveros argues that these individuals "felt empowered by the performances because the *actos* affirmed their dignity as humans" and in the process, articulated "an alternative understanding of citizenship" (134). Comparably, Dreamers Adrift's *Undocumented and Awkward* provides a mean by which the undocumented performers reenact their own experiences with discrimination and unequal power relations, developing an artistic means for dealing with anger and sadness, or rather the hegemonic trauma inflicted upon them. Additionally, Dreamers Adrift's work in these web series redefines citizenship and "the American experience" in its visioning of belonging and civic participation from the perspective of individuals who are undocumented. Since its formation, the collective has created about seventy-nine videos, gained a dedicated following on its blog and across its Facebook and Twitter accounts, and given lectures and workshops at various universities.

Goals and Ideologies

Initially, the participation of its members within the DREAMers movement played a strong role in shaping the content that the project created. Many of the strategies of DREAMers movement set out to humanize its movement and lives of undocumented immigrants. For instance, the "Coming Out of the Shadows" campaign in 2010 was an attempt to encourage undocumented youth to publicly share their identities and experiences of being undocumented, to claim visibility and control over their own stories. In coming out as undocumented, DREAMers put a human face to their cause, disrupting the imposed parameters of illegality by the nation-state that demands "silence and secrecy" and that undocumented immigrants "remain unknown and faceless" (Beltrán

248). Similarly, Dreamers Adrift's goal "document the undocumented" is partially informed by the DREAMers movement's goal to humanize its cause in the face of anti-immigrant discourse, or as Salgado explains, "to change the narrative" (King 2013).

Dreamers Adrift's online videos are a means of creating media that gives voice to their experiences. In King's interview with Salgado, he states that it was important for Dreamers Adrift to do media and gain control over their own stories and the stories of other undocumented students.

> Media comes in different forms. And it's important for us to do [media] because we have control of [the media we make]. We don't have control of what the mainstream media does. We don't have control over how they show us, but we could have control of this (King 2013).

Many of its first videos featured members such as Jesus Iñiguez recording themselves as spoke on politics and anti-immigrant discourses, grounding these topics in their own personal experiences and promoting DREAMer activism. Julio Salgado explains that Dreamers Adrift's initial attempts to share videos as, "We sort of put a camera in front of us … we tell our own stories and put ourselves out there" (King 2013). The collective also shared videos documenting personal moments such as when its member, Fernando Romero, received a notice in regards to his residency application. Additionally, Dreamers Adrift made creative videos such as "The Science of DREAM" that featured the members acting out skits and reading off their own poetry and stories. One of its first popular videos was "Día de los Sueños" which featured its members building an altar decorated with its members' caps and gowns to pay tribute to their dreams and to undocumented people more generally.

> One day it was just the four of us and we wanted to create an altar … and sort of represent the dreams that have passed, people who have given up on their dreams, and to sort of pay homage to future dreams. It was basically a flip-camera, and we filmed ourselves putting the altar together and then we put it up online, and people really digged it. They were like "Oh that's a different way of telling a story, a creative [and] different way." And so, we started making more videos like that. We were all film buffs and liked sketched comedy or whatever … and we wanted to get away from the whole like putting somebody in front of a camera and telling a story. Rather than doing that we were like, "Lets act out a story" (King 2013).

Dreamers Adrift's move to share videos in which its members acted out a story led to the creation of several web series, with its most revered being *Undocumented and Awkward*. In these web series, the members of Dreamers Adrift made themselves and their experiences visible and available for all on the Internet. Therefore, I argue that the collective's goal to have control over the stories and images of its own members reflects the goals and ideologies of the DREAMers movement to disrupt the silence and invisibility imposed on undocumented immigrants by state institutions and the mainstream media.

However, Dreamers Adrift also departs from the ideologies and ethos of early DREAMer activism that tended to be more nationalist and assimilationist. Dreamers Adrift took issue with assimilationist narratives that perpetuated notions of the good and deserving immigrants who only wanted to be American and aligned themselves with the more radical perspectives of the DREAMers movement. These radical stances sought to complicate traditional understandings of citizenship, legality, and borders. Therefore, in addition to depicting the lives of undocumented immigrants, Dreamers Adrift also create spaces for its collective members to be critical of certain aspects of DREAMer advocacy

as well as the United States more broadly. For instance, the first video shared on the Dreamers Adrift's blog was a video blog featuring Iñiguez, entitled, "Military Recruitment and the Dream Act," in which he discusses his disappointment that the DREAM Act failed to pass. He also engages in a critique of the residency through military service component of the bill. In the video Iñiguez recalls his experiences with military recruitment in high school, ultimately arguing that military recruiters exploit disadvantage youth by using them as disposable bodies. He states:

> Why would we teach them warfare and destruction ... if we could teach these kids how to relieve suffering, why would we want to teach them how to inflict it in a pull of a trigger or a push of a button? (Dreamers Adrift 2011).

This particular video demonstrates Dreamers Adrift as representing some of the more dissident or oppositional voices within the DREAMer movement. Furthermore, some of Dreamers Adrift's videos, particularly the music videos produced by Iñiguez, largely seek to pose critique of the United States government. For instance, in the video "Obama's Immigration Legacy," Iñiguez, performing under the name E.S.L., raps into a handheld camera while an electronic music sample provides the rhythm to his rhymes. He stands just in front of a large drawing by Salgado that reads "Fuck Your Border!" as he raps,

> This shit is inhumane/ A system set to profit off of pain/ How can I restrain and contain and stay sane with the pain and destain racing through my veins man/ I try to take it all with a salt grain, unafraid with my folks focused with a sharp game plan/ Your legacy's at stake so listen to our claim or we'll just have to tarnish your name man/ Obama it's time to do this/ Congress ain't movin'/ We've heard many excuses/ Heavy handed enforcement has proven to be ruthless and fruitless and useless/ We know what the truth is

> You're selling out communities brutally with cruelty/ You stand against unity/ You ain't foolin' me/ You ain't muting me/ I call for mutiny/ Maybe not mutiny, but definitely the struggle is real/ Tryin' to get motherfuckers out of detention centers, open the borders, family reunification, not one more, two million two many, and all the other motherfucking hashtags/ This is the Obama immigration legacy and it fuckin' sucks (Dreamers Adrift 2014).

In this video, Iñiguez performs in middle of his living room, his activism entering the domestic sphere and creating a political community while also offering critique of Obama and his policies that have resulted in the detention of thousands and deportation of almost 2 million immigrants. Iñiguez, and by extension Dreamers Adrift, take issue with the failure to pass comprehensive immigration reform that is humane. Iñiguez's tone is abrasive, his posture and movements convey conviction, it hints at his anger with Obama and the U.S. government, as well as his determination to fight for his rights and the rights of his community.

Figure 5 Screenshot of Iñiguez rapping in the video "Obama's Immigration Legacy."

The collective's blogging and digital videos redress the marginalization of undocumented immigrants by state policies and the erasure of their experiences and narratives in the mainstream media. Moreover, as alternative and activist media, Dreamers Adrift's web series *Undocumented and Awkward* and *Osito* take issue with the stereotypes of immigrants espoused by the mainstream. The web series often takes on a standoffish and oppositional tone in its use of satire to critique hegemonic notions of what undocumented immigrants are like. Dreamers Adrift is largely informed by the goals and ideologies of the DREAMers movement, but also includes other ideologies that are engaged with deconstructing borders and challenging accepted notions of belonging and citizenship.

Collective Practices and Funding

Like many other alternative and activist projects that are small-scale, Dreamers Adrift operate on a shoestring budget, with its members financially and creatively contributing to the project. Dreamers Adrift draws on the collective resources and skills of its members. For instance, the project has relied on Salgado artistic skills as well as Iñiguez's musical talents to create the bulk of its content. The mobilizing of activists' creative and technical skills is a typical strategy enacted by grassroots social movements who have little to no financial support. Furthermore, in an interview with Rogelio Alejandro Lopez, Salgado explains that the project is a collaborative process in which they discuss over the phone and Internet their future videos and blog content (2012). In addition to its main blog, Dreamers Adrift utilize social media platforms such as

Facebook and Twitter to communicate with other undocumented people and promote their content.

Content

While Dreamers Adrift was partially inspired by the online activism of DREAMers, particularly videos of DREAMers coming out as undocumented, its online videos departed from the video blogging, or rather vlogging, style of DREAMer testimony. Rather than solely share vlogs in which an individual sits in front of a camera and creates journalistic documentation of their thoughts or opinions, Dreamers Adrift focus is on creating performance videos, largely consisting of collective member's performing in skits and raps. The raps, generally produced and performed by Jesus Iñiguez, take a serious and agonistic approach in its lyrical critique of U.S. immigration policy and the nation-state. These music videos are often recorded live with a hand-held camera as Iñiguez raps over a beat loop in places such as his car or living room, giving the videos a certain "raw" characteristic. Furthermore, these raps pose critique while also connecting Iñiguez, and additionally Dreamers Adrift, to a wider public of DREAMer and immigrant activists and artists.

However, I would argue that Dreamers Adrift's web series are what especially set the collective a part from traditional DREAMer online activism, with *Undocumented and Awkward* being its most revered. The collective became intrigued with the idea of acting out skits after the success of its "Dia de los Suenos" video and in 2011 created *Undocumented and Awkward*. Unlike Dreamers Adrift's web series *UndocuCribs* and *Bad Joto's Club*, *Undocumented and Awkward* did not consist of only one or two

episodes but instead a total of 14 episodes, making it the collective's longest running series. The first *Undocumented and Awkward* episode featured Jesus Iñiguez acting out a short scenario in which he makes an "awkward" phone call to his blind date who he is suppose to meet at a club. Jesus stands alone outside of the club as he struggles to explain to his date that he was denied entry due to his lack of a California state ID. "Its just that he wouldn't take my ID, it's not a state ID ... it's a consulate card," he states anxiously to his date over the phone as two young people who appear to be intoxicated stumble by, shouting and laughing about being able to drive regardless of their drunken state because they have licenses. As the couple exits the scene, Jesus abruptly loses the phone call with his date, whether it is due to poor cellular reception or the date hanging up on him is unknown. The episode closes with the series catch phrase, "awkward!"

The particular episode is filmed at night using natural lighting and in one long take in which Jesus is the focus point of the wide shot. While it is more likely that the choice to shot the episode in a long take with no edit points speaks to Dreamers Adrift's shoe-string budget and rasquache style, on a symbolic level the wide and open space that surrounds Jesus draws attention to the alienation and ostracization he faces in first being denied into the club and the membership that it entails, and then rejection once more from his date who he becomes disconnected with due to his lack of proper or "legal" documentation. The awkwardness or embarrassment that Jesus goes through in this episode demonstrates the imposed alienation upon individuals who are undocumented. The manner in which state institutions perpetuate anti-immigrant discourses and policies forces these individuals to constantly keep their lack of citizenship a secret and live in a

state of anxiety. This first episode set the "awkward" but humorous tone for future episodes of the series. For instance, in "Episode 2" and "Episode 3" Dreamers Adrift depict the anxiety and awkwardness that some undocumented immigrants encounter with being constantly questioned by their friends and peers who are citizens as to why they do not have drivers licenses or way they work at low-wage jobs despite having college degrees.

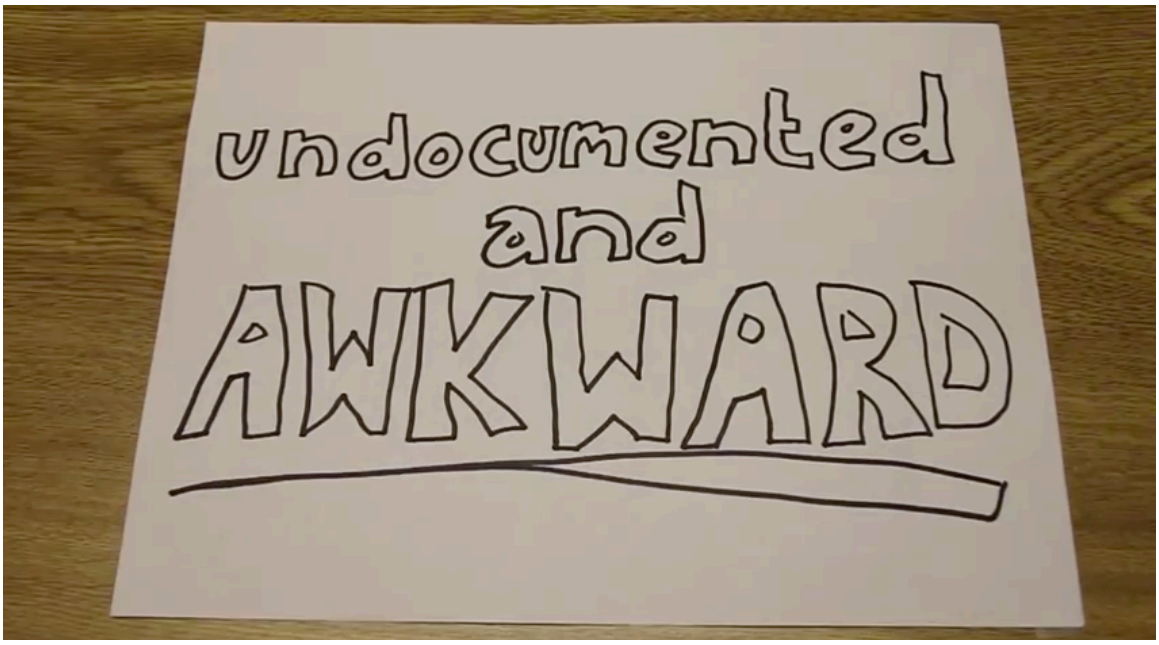

Figure 6 Screenshot of *Undocumented and Awkward*'s title sequence.

Figure 7 Screenshot of Jesus Iñiguez in "Episode 1" of *Undocumented and Awkward*.

Moreover, episodes of Dreamers Adrift's *Undocumented and Awkward* were composed of satirical reenactments of its members past experiences. Julio Salgado, who is a recurring performer in the *Undocumented and Awkward* series, states,

> We started talking about how a lot of us are sad- when we talk about being undocumented- because being undocumented can be awkward and sad and some stories are horrible. But we were like, "but we need to make fun of this." We need to use humor as a way to cope with this … a lot of the videos, they look painfully awkward and real because most of the time they were real and based on real stories (King 2013).

In many respects, the personal experiences of those involved in the making of *Undocumented and Awkward* were not only utilized to create the storylines for the series' episodes, but also, I argue to establish a sense of intimacy that humanizes the experiences of undocumented immigrants. In the sharing of these deeply personal and often painful stories, Dreamers Adrift connects with the goals of the DREAMers movement.

Additionally, the autobiographical nature of these episodes also provides the means for Dreamers Adrift to bond with viewers who have had similar experiences of alienation.

Additionally, Salgado's statement also reveals how Dreamers Adrift utilize humor as a means of sharing one's own story and critiquing the reasons behind the marginalization of undocumented immigrants. The strategy of using humor as tool for coping and posing social critique has also been employed by the Latin@ immigrant performance group, El Teatro Campesino. In creating satirical performances or parodying their own experiences, the collective's members are able to access traumatic experiences and therapeutically work through their feelings of anger, sadness, and alienation. For example, "Episode 5" of *Undocumented and Awkward*, which follows the story of two Latino men who struggle to get through a rocky first date, is based off Julio Salgado's own experience of going out on a date with a gay Latino Republican and revealing his status as undocumented (King 2013).

> Yeah, that story came up after something that happened to me. I went on a date and I told the person I was undocumented. Turned out he was … a gay Latino Republican! God! [laughs] But it was so embarrassing because … we had this argument. And I was really embarrassed and ashamed of being undocumented because he made me feel really bad (King 2013).

The episode stars undocumented activists and poet, Yosmair Reyes and Julio, who plays the role of the gay Latino Republican. From the beginning, Yosmair and Julio's date is filled with tension that is arguably sparked by Yosmair's attempt to embrace Julio as he greets him only for Julio to reject the hug. Julio who appears to recover quickly from the awkward the situation explains, "I'm not out to a lot of people." However, the difference in the men's publicity of their sexualities is not what

continuously causes tension to develop between Yosmair and Julio, but rather Julio's questioning and scrutinizing of Yosmair's circumstances. For instance, as they settle into their table, Julio begins by speaking about how difficult it was to find parking and asks if Yosmair also had trouble, to which he explains that he actually took the bus to get to the restaurant. Julio proceeds to tease Yosmair about taking the bus, laughing as he says, "You took the bus here? What is this highschool?" Yosmair attempts to dodge Julio's questioning as to why he didn't drive to the restaurant, becoming uncomfortable when Julio asks if he even has a car. In this specific exchange between Yosmair and Julio, it is apparent that there are certain class differences between that two.

Moreover, in the similar fashion of the first episode of the series, "Episode 5"is shot in one long take with no cuts. The shot itself is framed as a medium-two shot that allows viewers to see both the characters' faces clearly and read their expressions throughout their interaction. Furthermore, the camera remains stationary and at eye level, which works to encourage viewers to settle into the scene on equal footing with the characters. Also, the actors are staged in a "quarter turn" so that they are shown in profile but remain centrally focused on each other. The staging and framing of the actors in this particular episode promotes a degree of intimacy, however, this intimacy is aggravated through how tightly framed the shot is. Despite the episode's open form, the actors in the scene are placed at the edges of the frame and appear to have little room to move. In tightly framing the episode, Dreamers Adrift conveys a certain degree of discomfort or awkwardness. Overall, the lack of camera movement and/or cuts and the staging of actors

exaggerate the length and mood of the skit so that the “awkwardness” that is displayed through the acting and exchange of dialogue is emphasized.

Figure 8: A screenshot of “Episode 5” in which Julio and Yosmair have an awkward first date.

Figure 9: A screenshot of "Episode 5." Yosmair attempts to order a drink by discretely using his Mexican consulate identification card only for the waitress to out his lack of citizenship in front of his date.

The tension or "awkwardness" between Yosmair and Julio intensifies when Julio pressures Yosmair into getting a beer. When the waitress serving them asks to see their IDs Yosmair becomes distressed, his hands rubbing the back of his neck as he takes his time getting out his wallet. Yosmair, seeing that Julio is not paying attention, quickly gives his ID to the waitress who upon inspecting it says, "Sorry, we need an U.S. ID," unknowingly outing Yosmair's lack of documentation. Julio begins to question Yosmair as to why he does not have a Californian ID. Annoyed, he explains to Yosmair that it is rather simple to go to the Department of Motor Vehicles and get an ID. What follows is a heated exchange of dialogue between the two men. For instance:

Julio: How can you not get a California ID?

Yosmair: Cause its ... *–rubs at his brow and stutters* – I'm … I'm… I'm undocumented.

Julio: Undocumented? What's undocumented?

Yosmair: Undocumented-

Julio: *cuts Yosmair off*- Like illegal? Like you're an illegal?

Yosmair: No, like I don't have the proper documents to get an ID.

Julio: A.K.A. illegal.

Yosmair: Well, I mean the proper term is undocumented. Yeah, not illegal.

Julio: *shakes his head and shrugs*- Illegal's illegal man. You don't have papers …

Yosmair: That implies a lot of things so no.

Julio: *laughs* – That implies a lot of things? What does that even mean? Didn't you tell me you went to college?

Yosmair: Yeah, yeah, I go to school… I'm in school.

Julio: How do you go to school if you don't have papers… if you're- *uses air quotes mockingly*- undocumented?

Yosmair: I'm an AB540 student.

Julio: A what?

Yosmair: An AB540…

Julio: The hell is an AB540 student?

Yosmair: Well, since I am a foreigner…an alleged foreigner-

Julio: *cuts Yosmair off*- An illegal?

Yosmair: No…

Julio: Just calling it like it is man. It's weird. Just calling it like it is man.

As their verbal exchange continues, the body language of Julio is demanding as he leans in towards Yosmair and initiates his line of questioning concerning his legal status. Yosmair, on the other hand fidgets, as he becomes emotionally distressed. That is until Julio pushes him to the brink of his limit and he begins to respond back just as aggressively, his body language then begin to shift to convey his annoyance. Cinematically the episode is meant to convey a sense of extreme discomfort and anxiety as we witness these two individuals from different Latino experiences debate issues of citizenship and social status.

Julio's degradation of Yosmair by calling him an "illegal" repeatedly is framed through humor and parody as "awkward." In depicting Salgado's experience as humorous, Dreamers Adrift assert control over the context of the situation and turn the lived experience from one of marginalization and trauma into an empowering cultural work. Furthermore, similar to the way performers in El Teatro Campesino would enact events inspired by their lives and role play as the racist and cruel Patrons (bosses), Salgado takes on the role of his oppressor, of the person who made him feel "embarrassed and ashamed" (King 2013). When recollecting his experience in filming this particular episode Salgado states:

> It was really fun playing the person who made me feel really bad, because it was like therapy. The messed up part was that all the fucked up shit I was saying came so natural, because you hear all these things all the time … But it was really cool to be able to portray that thing again. And again, it's having control of [it.] I didn't have control of what happened at the time. And just looking back, and I was like, that was funny (King 2013).

For Salgado role-playing as the person who made him feel shame and worthlessness who extremely empowering in the sense that he believed by reenacting the event he was able to gain control. The episode then served as a space for Salgado to work through the shame imposed on him by his date, providing him an opportunity for catharsis. *Undocumented and Awkward* is then an example of how some Latin@ alternative and activist media attempt to address hegemonic trauma inflicted upon Latin@s by anti-immigrant and anti-Latin@ policies and discourses.

Dreamers Adrift employ a form of participatory storytelling in which their stories are used to create comedic entertainment. In this case, participatory storytelling as a practice is used to connect and relate to other undocumented youth and voice the authors' opinions and perspectives concerning the social and political exclusion and marginalization of undocumented youth, while also functioning as a very public therapeutic form of self-representation. Through hosting their creative production on YouTube's platform, Dreamers Adrift forge a space on the social media site that facilitates the sharing of intimate and personal aspects of undocumented subject's lives, and thus facilitate a greater visibility of this marginalized group. Dreamers Adrift's use of participatory storytelling in the *Undocumented and Awkward* web series – in which texts range from intimate and personal moments of coming out or being "outed" as undocumented to expressing political opinions concerning immigration and education reform – works to create spaces to expose, resist, and negotiate hegemonic discourse(s). As it represents the traumas of its members and documents the undocumented, Dreamers Adrift contributes the constitution of an alternative public or counterpublic where

undocumented immigrants can pose critique and tell their own stories, thereby creating opportunities to better understand oneself and members of their community.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated the manner in which Dreamers Adrift create spaces to expose, resist, and negotiate hegemonic discourse(s) and discuss difficult issues concerning undocumented identity. Dreamers Adrift, as alternative and activist media, provides its members and audience viewers with opportunities to better understand themselves and others through the practice of participatory storytelling and the sharing of intimate moments and personal experiences in their web series *Undocumented and Awkward*. Additionally, I argue that the Dreamers Adrift's web series is a counter-site to the U.S. national cultural and discourses concerning the illegality of undocumented immigrants. Through *Undocumented and Awkward*, Dreamers Adrift address the discourses of undocumented immigrants as deviant and unlawful through the use of humor and/or satire to make visible the real-life experience of the people these discourses impact.

Furthermore, I believe that through thinking of immigration as both practice and discourse, we may begin to nuance our discussion so that we consider the "materiality" or the manner in which discourse shape the way individuals think of themselves and their notions of belonging and influence their development of an oppositional consciousness. The acts of labor, memory, and resistance that emerge from the imposed marginality of immigration are what Lisa Lowe has termed "immigrant acts." It has been the goal of this

paper to demonstrate the manner in which *Undocumented and Awkward* is an example of an immigrant act. Based on a close reading of episodes from the web series I argue that the sharing of intimate lived experience via participatory storytelling serves as an immigrant act of labor, memory, and resistance in which the members of Dreamers Adrift (re)assert their identities and visually constitute themselves as they address the erasure of undocumented immigrants' existence and labor contributions from the U.S. national imaginary. The group also provides a space for the development of collective identity/solidarity as well as for self-reflexivity and healing in the process of disrupting immigrant threat narratives that cast them as undeserving criminals.

Undocumented youth continue to challenge the boundaries of citizenship, as they demand their human rights and the acknowledgement of their struggles and contributions to U.S. society. They have developed unique and viable strategies to mobilize and organize their civic engagement through a combination of traditional civic practices and the adoption of new media and digital practices. As new platforms and mobile technologies emerge, undocumented youth will continue to develop powerful ways to talk back, represent themselves, and mobilize their political affiliations, and in the process challenge stereotypes of youth as politically powerless and stereotypes of undocumented immigrants as socially and technologically inept, incapable of integrating into U.S. society, and as criminals. Undocumented youth who use the web to civically participate and engage with others utilize new media skills to mobilize social movements, disseminate knowledge and information, produce unique productions, challenge and negotiate socially constructed notions of undocumented immigration and immigrants, and

reclaim their identities as undocumented. Furthermore, various digital practices, undocumented youth highlight the complexities and contradictions of being an undocumented youth living in the United States while also creating spaces to share their stories and reclaim their identities as a source of pride.

Conclusion: The Cause Continues

Throughout this thesis I have focused on independent and non-commercial alternative and activist media created by Latin@ producers. While some might be quick to identify texts such as *Latino Rebels*' website as simply a form of ethnic media – often defined as media by and for "ethnics" living in a host country typically in the ethnic group's language (Shi 599) – I argue that certain Latin@-produced media seek to operate beyond a point of providing information and/or entertainment for their individual ethnic minority communities. Some of these media also seek to challenge or critique the dominance of mainstream media structures and state apparatuses. The ways in which these media choose to frame, design, organize, and distribute their content are part of the way they may pose these critiques, and in doing so, constitute themselves as alternative and activist publics. That is, perhaps all Latin@ alternative and activist media are ethnic media, but not all Latin@ oriented ethnic media is alternative. Therefore, contextualizing Latin@-produced media is important for determining whether or not certain media texts are in fact "alternative." As this thesis has demonstrated, the studying of certain Latin@-produced media as alternative and activist media affords the opportunity to contextualize Latin@ media production in regards to social movements, activism, and resistance, and therein consider the ways in which Latin@ media production is a part of the processes of democracy and civic participation

I define Latin@ alternative and activist media as media projects that generally critique the marginalization and exclusion of Latin@s and other minority groups in U.S. mainstream media and society. For the most part, Latin@ alternative and activist media

have tended to serve as components of social movements and activism, such was the case with Puerto Rican and Cuban exile presses in New York City during the 1930s and now more recently with the online DREAMer activism of undocumented Latin@ youth. However, not all Latin@ alternative media have ties with social movements or groups. Take for instance organizations or collectives such as *Latino Rebels*. *Latino Rebels* creates and shares content that does not conform to the traditional conventions of mainstream media. Instead it creates content it believes represent and serve Latin@ communities in ways that the mainstream does not. While *Latino Rebels* may engage in political and cultural critique it does not function as media for a specific social movement, but instead exists as an alternative media outlet that espouses counter-hegemonic content. I have also argued that any definition of Latin@ alternative and activist media should be able to address the various power relations (racial, gendered, sexuality, and class) that shape the vast diversity of Latin@s' experiences that manifest discursively and visually in their cultural production. For example, we should carefully consider the ways in which Latin@ feminist oriented alternative media exists in tandem with (and opposition to) sexist and homophobic Latin@-produced media, as well as in opposition to racist and nativist mainstream media and state policies. I argue that investigating the differentiating practices, audiences, and goals of U.S. mainstream media and independent and non-commercial Latin@ alternative and activist media affords the opportunity to critically complicate studies concerned with Latin@ politics of representation, identity, civic participation and communication.

Latin@ alternative and activist media should not be strictly understood as examples of a minority group contesting the mainstream and/or demanding access and rights from the mainstream through self representation. Instead, I argue that Latin@ alternative and activist media also express and question in-group identity and enact varying degrees of in-group civic participation and empowerment. The result is the formation of counterpublics and publics that exist amongst each other and other non-Latin@ oriented publics in a complex web of power relations. I believe that conceptualizing Latin@-produced media as operating within multiple Latin@ counterpublics and publics is beneficial in conducting critical studies of the cultural production of Latin@s, especially when taking into account the wide range of Latin@ identities along axes of identity and difference. It is within these various counterpublics and publics that Latin@s create and negotiate in-group identity and enact civic participation and empowerment.

Furthermore, it is within these counterpublics that Latin@ alternative and activist media publicize their understandings of Latinidad and build and strengthen imagined communities. I propose that research concerned with Latin@ alternative and activist media, but also Latin@ media more generally, most go beyond basic understandings of self-representation and resistance. Rather, research on Latin@ alternative and activist media needs to critically examine the textual nature of these media in relation to the goals and practices of the producers and their affiliations, if any, to social movements and activism amd their relationship to the national and transnational. Moreover, we should

define specifically what we mean by resistance and should be cautious in labeling *all* Latin@ media as inherently resistant and/or as strictly counter-hegemonic

In this study, I examined the online content of *Latino Rebels* and Dreamers Adrift, paying close attention to the social and political contexts surrounding these projects. My investigation determined that these case studies of Latin@ alternative and activist media create spaces to resist and negotiate the practices of mainstream media and hegemonic discourses. Chapter 2 focused specifically on *Latino Rebels* as alternative journalism, I argue that the contributors of *Latino Rebels* position themselves as "alternative" and "Latino," as well as with an "Us" vs "Them" rhetoric that typically presents U.S. government and mainstream media as the "Them," outsiders who know and care little about Latin@s and the contributors of *Latino Rebels* as the insiders, legitimate producers of knowledge and information concerning Latin@s. This chapter also argues the *Latino Rebels* posits a pan-ethnic Latindad that values political participation (activism) and social consciousness. Chapter 3 examined the transformative processes of Dreamers Adrift's web series *Undocumented and Awkward*. The chapter also sought to investigate the ways Dreamers Adrift's content queers democracy and complicates notions of citizenship and participation. I argue that the collective's videos push back at racist and nativist discourse and state policies that seek to render immigrants (and to some extent Latin@s) voiceless and invisible by making themselves visible, by publishing their own experiences of marginalization in the collective's web series *Undocumented and Awkward*. This chapter views Dreamers Adrift's web series and their utilization of participatory storytelling – the sharing intimate moments and personal experiences— as

immigrant acts of labor, memory, and resistance in which Dreamers Adrift assert their identities as participating members of the nation. These videos also create a space for the development of collective identity and self-reflexivity.

Though my case studies dealt with only new media texts, I argue that Latin@ alternative and activist media includes the rich history of Latin@ public performances and theater, muralism and poster making, feminist and queer print cultures, radical presses, radio, film and video, and public access television. Many of these older forms of Latin@ media and performance were used to mobilize communities for political action in addition to existing as modes of self-representation. Take for example how Chican@ art supported Chicano nationalism and how Nuyorican poetry supported Puerto Rican/Nuyorican nationalism during the civil rights era. These Latin@ alternative and activist media demonstrate the ways in which Latin@s express their sense of belonging, enacting varying degrees of cultural citizenship as they voice their grievances and ideas concerning how to strengthen and improve the nation-state, regardless of the way discourse and state policies have sought to legally and symbolically render Latin@s as non-citizens.

Despite figures showing the large presence of Latin@s in the United States, Latin@s continue to be underrepresented in mainstream media and/or reduced to stereotypes. We also continue to struggle for creative decision-making positions in media industries. This exclusion and racialization of Latin@s on and behind the screen is a part of the pushing away and pushing down of Latin@ in order to maintain the hegemonic order (Amaya 2014). For these reasons, alternative and activist Latin@-produced media

can be understood as responses to the dismal mainstream representation of Latin@s. The independent production of alternative and activist media offer opportunities for Latin@s to make themselves seen and heard. Latin@ alternative and activist media demonstrate the various ways Latin@s resist and/or talk back to the mainstream's attempt to homogenize and racialize Latin@ identity. However, I believe that a balance between alternative and mainstream Latin@ media is what we should strive for. In this regard, Latin@s must then have opportunities to be in creative decision-making positions such as writers, producers, directors, and executives. As scholars such as Frances Negrón-Muntaner have previously proposed, the lack of Latin@s behind the screen may very well account for problematic and minimal representations of Latin@ characters on the screen (2014). Therefore, I believe that in order to bring more Latin@ voices and narratives into the mainstream, state policies and legislation is needed to open doors that have previously been closed to minority groups. Additionally, various media programs and advocacy groups should create outreach programs that encourage young Latin@s to get involved in making media and art. Many young Latin@s experience difficulties in the education system, such as attending poorly funded schools, with a poor quality of teaching, and being tracked into vocational classes. Therefore, many of these students will never have the opportunity to get their hands on cameras or editing software, or to take theater and multimedia classes that will allow them the opportunity to get involved in making media. However, while Latin@-produced media does not hinge on the possession of technical skills and professional equipment, I do believe that providing young Latin@s with access to media skills and equipment can only encourage them to

find value in their experiences and stories. This in turn strengthens the possibilities for future Latin@-produced alternative and mainstream media. These future Latin@ producers can contribute insightful perspectives to mainstream media and/or create alternative and activist media that continue to challenge the hegemonic order, contribute to the struggle for justice, and generate their own meaningful ways of belonging.

Notes

[1] Spanish to English translation: Can you Hear Me?

[2] A reference to Arlene Davila's concept of Latino Spin; see Davila 2008; 2011.

[3] In no way am I suggesting that there are not issues of access in regards to new media, the Internet, and Latin@s. Despite the romanticism that some scholars espouse about how great and inexpensive the web is, I would argue that new media and the Internet can be quite costly when one takes into account the monthly cost of an Internet provider, the cost of equipment (computers, mobile devices, or routers), and the cost to blog/web themes and design. Additionally, studies have shown that Latin@s still lag in access to the Internet in comparison to white folks.

[4] The term DREAMer(s) has most often been used to refer to undocumented youth activists in support of comprehensive policy that would grant citizenship through higher-education options for undocumented students (Source). It will be elaborated on in Chapter two of this thesis.

[5] Here I am using "Latino" because that is the terminology Ramírez-Berg uses throughout his book *Latino Images.*

[6] Here I use "Latino" because that is the term that Hector Amaya chooses to use in his book, *Citizen Excess*.

[7] The term Latino is used to reflect Rodriguez's use of it in her book.

[8] "Raza" tended to be a term heavily used in male dominated segments of the Chicano movement, and therefore Camplis use of it demonstrates how these early theorizations of Chicano film, and moreover, Chicano film production were primarily male centric.

[9] "Latina/o" is the term used throughout the Rodriguez and Beltrán essay, "Nueva Fronteras."

[10] It is important to not that most interpretations of Habermas' *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* are based off the English translation of the text over 40 years ago and ultimately we must recognize that most of these interpretations and reading of Habermas' theory can never truly be a hundred percent correct.

[11] See note 5

[12] Spanish to English translation: A Rebel Yell.

[13] From this point on, los Rebeldes (the Rebels) will be used to refer to the writers/contributors of Latino Rebels.

[14] "The Latino Daily Show" is a reference to Comedy Central's *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* (1999+), a late night satirical television program.

[15] Latino is used here because that is the term Gutiérrez uses.

[16] América Rodriguez is one of the few scholars who has documented that Latin@ broadcast news media has existed since the 1930s when Mexican entrepreneurs first entered the American radio (1999: 30). Future scholarship interested in Latin@-produced news media would stand to benefit from a study of Latin@-produced broadcast news.

[17] The Zapatista movement is an agrarian-focused movement that continues to be motivated by the ideologies of libertarian socialism, Marxism, and to some extent anarchism.

[18] Spanish to English translation: Without Borders.

[19] AB 540 Student refers to Assembly Bill AB540 that grants undocumented students who attended high school in the California the right to pay in-state tuition at public California universities and community colleges.

[20] See page 21 for explanation of terminology.

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